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THE WORKS OF

VOLUME NINETEEN

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CAPTAIN FRACASSE

PART THREE

MY PRIVATE MENAGERIE



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“The rider, letting go the bridle for a moment,
drew a knife from his jacket, and cut the belt
to which Sigognac was clinging with des-
peration” *Frontispiece*

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was the Prince, Vallombreuse’s father” . . *Page 130*

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his bedhead, drew it, and fell on guard” . . “ 212

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lord and father, that I have loved him since
the day I first saw him’” “ 252

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C A P T A I N
F R A C A S S E

XV

M A L A R T I C A T W O R K

GREAT as had been the Duke's anger when he returned to his residence, it was no greater than the Baron's when he learned of Vallombreuse's intrusion upon Isabella, and it took all the persuasive powers of the Tyrant and Blazius to keep him from hastening to the Duke's mansion and challenging him to a duel; which his lordship would assuredly have refused, since Sigognac, being neither the brother, the husband, nor the declared lover of the actress, had no right to call for an explanation of an act that, besides, was quite self-explanatory. In France, men have always enjoyed the right to make love to pretty women. Undoubtedly the setting the ruffian to attack Sigognac on the Pont-



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Neuf did not come under the head of fair play, but though it was probable that the Duke had ordered it, it was no easy matter to trace the devious connection between the rascal and the great nobleman. Even had it been possible to do so, the difficulty of proving it would still have stood in the way; and besides, there was no one to whom Sigognac could appeal to have such cowardly attempts punished. In the eyes of the world, Sigognac, who concealed his real rank, was no more than a low play-actor, a mummer of mean estate, whom a nobleman like Vallombreuse was perfectly entitled to have thrashed, thrown into prison, or slain, as he preferred, without any one making the least objection, merely on the ground that he was annoyed or interfered with by him. Isabella's virtuous resistance would have been ascribed to an affectation of prudery, for the virtue of actresses met with more incredulous Thomases and sceptical Pyrrhos than believers. So it was hopeless to hold the Duke responsible, much to Sigognac's disgust, compelled as he was to acknowledge the force of the arguments urged by Herod and the Pedant, who insisted that it was best to lie low and keep quiet, while keeping a bright look-out; for it was certain that his lordship, handsome as an angel and



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wicked as the devil, would not abandon his purpose, even though it had so far failed in every respect. But it was Isabella's pleading glance, as she clasped Sigo-gnac's trembling hands in her own fair ones, that finally calmed the angry Baron, whom she besought to restrain himself for her sake; and matters then resumed their normal course.

The first performances of the company had proved signally successful: Isabella's modest grace, Zerbina's brilliancy and spirit, Serafina's coquettish elegance, the superb extravagance in which Captain Fracasse indulged, the Tyrant's majestic pomposity, Leander's white teeth and rosy lips, the grotesque good-nature of the Pedant, Scappino's subtle cleverness, and the Duenna's comic skill, proved as effective in Paris as in the provinces. All they now lacked, having obtained the approbation of the city, was the approbation of the Court, which contained the people of the best taste and the most expert connoisseurs. It was indeed proposed to summon them to Saint-Germain,—the King, hearing of their performances, having expressed the wish to witness their acting, greatly to the delight of Herod, who was at once manager and treasurer of the company. They were frequently engaged by people



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of quality, who had them perform in their mansions when they wished to entertain ladies desirous of seeing actors whose reputation already equalled that of the companies of the Hôtel de Bourgogne and the Marais.

Herod therefore was not surprised, now that he was used to such invitations, at being called upon one fine morning, in the inn of the Rue Dauphine, by a sort of steward or majordomo, of venerable appearance, like all people of that class who have grown old in the service of a noble family, and who expressed the wish to speak to him, on behalf of his master, the Count de Pommereuil, on business connected with his profession.

The majordomo was dressed in black velvet from head to foot ; he wore a chain of gold ducats round his neck, silk stockings, and shoes with large bows ; the shoes square-toed, and somewhat easy to the foot, as would be the case with an old man apt to suffer from gout. A lace cravat fell white upon his doublet, and set off his complexion, tanned by the open air of the country, and on his face his white eyebrows, mustache, and chin tuft showed like touches of snow upon an antique bust. His long white hair fell down to his shoulders and imparted to him a most patriarchal and trustworthy



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appearance. He was plainly one of those stewards, who have left no successors, who care for their masters' interests more keenly than for their own, who remonstrate against needless expenditure, and in times of distress use their own poor savings to help the family whose bread they have eaten in the days of prosperity.

Herod could not sufficiently admire the handsome face and honest looks of the majordomo, who, having bowed to him, said in courteous language :—

“ You are, I believe, the Master Herod who manages, with a hand as firm as Apollo’s, ruling the company of the Muses, the excellent troupe the renown of which fills the city and has even now gone beyond it, for it has reached the estate on which my master resides.”

“ I have that honour,” answered Herod, with as gracious a bow as he could manage with his grim and tragic face.

“ The Count de Pommereuil,” went on the old fellow, “ is anxious to entertain some guests of his by having a play performed in his château, and it occurred to him that your company would best answer his purpose. He has therefore ordered me to ascertain whether you could manage to give one performance at



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his place, which is only a few miles distant. His lordship is a generous master who does not mind expense, and is willing to pay you your own price in order to secure the services of your illustrious troupe."

"I shall do my utmost to satisfy so generous a gentleman," answered the Tyrant, "although it is not an easy matter for us to leave Paris, even for a few days, when we are meeting with such success here."

"Three days will be ample," returned the majordomo. "One to go, one for the performance, and one for the return journey. We have a stage already prepared, so that you will merely have to set up your scenery. Further, here are a hundred pistoles which the Count de Pommereuil has commissioned me to hand to you for the purpose of defraying incidental expenses. A similar sum will be paid you after the performance, and the ladies are sure to be presented with a ring, a pin, or a bracelet, women being fond of such souvenirs."

As he spoke the Count de Pommereuil's majordomo drew from his pocket a long and heavy purse, chockfull of money, inclined it, and poured out on the table one hundred handsome new crowns most attractive in their brightness.



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The Tyrant gazed with an air of deep satisfaction upon the coins heaped up one upon another, and stroked his long black beard. When he had looked his fill he picked them up, ranged them in piles, and then dropped them into his pocket with a gesture of assent.

“I understand that you accept,” said the majordomo, “and I may inform my master that you will come.”

“My comrades and I are at his lordship’s disposal,” answered Herod. “And now let us settle the day upon which the performance is to take place; and let me know which play his lordship prefers, so that we may take with us the necessary costumes and scenery.”

“You had better come on Thursday,” replied the majordomo, “for my master is very eager to have the entertainment come off. As for the play, he leaves the selection of it to your own good taste.”

“‘The Comic Illusion,’ by a young and promising Norman author,” said Herod, “is the newest thing out at present and the success of the day.”

“‘The Comic Illusion’ be it. The verse is not bad, and there is a splendid part of a swaggering Hector in it.”



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“Then all that is necessary now is for you to tell me, quite fully, so that we shall not run the risk of losing our way, the locality of his lordship’s residence, and the readiest way of reaching it.”

The Count de Pommereuil’s steward explained the locality and the road to it with such wealth of accurate detail that a blind man could not have failed to reach the place; then, fearing, no doubt, that once the company had started the manager might forget all the directions to “go straight on, then turn to your right, then the first turn on the left,” he added:—

“Do not trouble to remember all that, for your mind must be sufficiently burdened with the lines of our great poets. I shall send a lackey to show you the way.”

The business having been thus settled, the old gentleman withdrew with many a bow, that Herod returned, and which he acknowledged by new bows, lower than the preceding one, so that as they bobbed up and down in front of each other they looked like two brackets suffering from Saint Vitus’s dance. Determined not to be outdone in civility, the Tyrant accompanied his visitor down the stairs and across the court-yard, stopping only at the outer gate, from which



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he addressed to the old fellow a final bow, his back bent, his chest drawn in as far as his paunch would allow, his arms limp, and his forehead almost touching the ground.

If Herod had followed with his eyes the Count de Pommereuil's majordomo to the corner of the street, he might have noticed that, contrary to the laws of perspective, the old fellow grew taller in direct ratio to the distance he traversed. His bent back straightened out; the senile trembling of his hands vanished, and his lively gait proved he was by no means gouty. But Herod saw nothing of all this, for he had already re-entered the inn.

On the Wednesday morning, while the inn servants were engaged in loading the scenery and boxes of costumes upon a wain drawn by two stout horses, hired by the Tyrant for the conveyance of the company, a tall rascal of a lackey in a very handsome livery, riding on a Percheron horse and cracking his whip, turned up at the inn door, in order to hurry the actors and to act as their guide. The ladies, who, like all women, were fond of lying abed and spending an unconscionable time in dressing,—even when they are actresses, accustomed to dress and undress in a twinkling, on



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account of the changes of costume required on the stage, — at last came down and settled themselves as comfortably as they could on the boards, covered with bundles of straw, that had been fitted to the sides of the van. The small figure on the Samaritaine was hammering out the hour of eight upon its gong when the heavy vehicle pulled out of the court-yard of the inn. In less than half an hour it had passed out of the Saint-Antoine gate and beyond the Bastile, the towers of which were reflected in the dark waters of the moat. The suburb, with its cultivated open spaces and its small houses was traversed, and the vehicle proceeded through the countryside in the direction of Vincennes ; the donjon rising in the distance in a vaporous, bluish haze, the remains of the night mists that the sun was dispelling as the wind dispels the smoke of guns.

The horses being fresh and travelling at a good pace, the company of actors soon reached the old citadel, its Gothic defences preserving an air of strength, although they were unfitted to resist cannons and mortars. The gilded crescents topping the minarets of the chapel built by Pierre de Montereau, flashed brightly above the ramparts as though they took pride in finding themselves alongside the cross, the symbol



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of the Redemption. Having spent a few moments in admiring the monument of the former glory of the French kings, the van entered the wood, in which, amid thickets and young trees rose majestically a number of old oaks, no doubt contemporaries of the famous tree under which Saint Louis administered justice, an occupation eminently befitting a monarch.

The road not being much travelled, every now and then the van, which rolled noiselessly along over the soft ground, often covered with grass, startled rabbits engaged in their morning gambols and stroking their noses with their paws. The little fellows would take to their heels as if a pack of dogs were after them, to the great entertainment of the players. Or else a roe deer sprang terrified across the road, and they could follow it for a time in its flight among the leafless trees. Sigognac, born and bred in the country, took especial pleasure in these happenings. It delighted him to see once more fields, bushes, woods, and wild animals, sights he had not beheld since he had taken to living in the city, where one sees naught but houses, muddy streets, smoking chimneys, and other works of man, and not of God. He would have been terribly weary of that life, had he not enjoyed the company of the



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sweet girl, whose eyes were blue enough to make up for the loss of the heavens.

On issuing from the wood they came to a short rise. Sigognac said to Isabella :—

“Would you not like, dear one, while the van is slowly climbing this hill, to get down and take my arm for a short walk? It will warm you and take the stiffness out of your limbs. The road is smooth, and it is a lovely winter’s day, sharp and bracing, but not too cold.”

The young actress accepted Sigognac’s invitation, rested the tips of her fingers upon his proffered hand, and sprang lightly to the ground. It was an opportunity of granting her lover a quiet talk by themselves, which her modesty would have led her to avoid in the privacy of a closed room. They walked on, at times borne along by their love and as if treading on air, at times stopping to gaze upon each other and to enjoy the delight of being together, side by side, arm in arm, their eyes fixed upon each other. Sigognac repeated to the young girl that he adored her, and though she had heard it a score of times, it seemed ever new to her as no doubt was to Adam his first attempt at speech on the morrow of the Creation. As, in matters of senti-



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ment, she was most refined and disinterested, she endeavoured by teasing and by caressing refusals to restrain within the limits of friendship the passion she had resolved not to reward, convinced as she was that this would not be advantageous to the Baron's future. But the loving discussions and disputes merely increased Sigognac's devotion, and just then he had as completely forgotten the haughty Yolande as though she had never existed.

“ Do what you may, sweetheart,” he said to his beloved, “ you will never tire out my constancy ; and if needs must, I shall wait until your scruples have vanished of themselves, even if it be until your lovely golden hair has turned to silver.”

“ Oh ! ” cried Isabella, “ then shall I indeed be a remedy for love fit to appal the most passionate, and I should fear to punish you for your fidelity were I to reward it.”

“ Even when you shall have reached the age of three-score,” gallantly returned Sigognac, “ your charms will be untouched, like those of the lady sung by Maynard ; for your beauty springs from the soul, and that is immortal.”

“ All the same,” retorted the young girl, “ you would



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be dreadfully disappointed if I were to take you at your word and promised to wed you even ere I reached the three-score, say at fifty. But," she went on, resuming her serious manner, "a truce to all this nonsense. You know that my mind is made up, and you ought to be satisfied with being loved better than man ever was since hearts first began to beat upon earth."

"I own that so sweet an avowal ought to satisfy me, but my love being infinite, it brooks no limit. God may say to the ocean, 'Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther,' and the ocean will obey; but a love such as mine knows no bounds, and grows ever greater, even though your celestial voice bids it stay its course."

"Sigognac, you will make me angry if you go on," said Isabella, with a pout more witching than the loveliest smile; for, in spite of herself, her soul was filled with joy as she listened to the outpouring of a love that no coldness could dismay.

They walked on in silence for a time, Sigognac fearing, did he say more, to displease her whom he loved more than his own life. Suddenly Isabella let go his arm and ran, light as a doe, and with a quick cry of gladness, to the roadside. She had caught sight, on the other side of the ditch, under an oak tree and half



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concealed by the fallen leaves, of a violet, the first one of the season unquestionably, for the month was February. She knelt down, gently brushed away the leaves and the blades of grass, plucked the flower, and came back with it happier than if she had found in the moss a diamond brooch mislaid by a princess.

“ See how pretty it is,” said she to Sigognac; “ its petals have barely opened to the first rays of the sun.”

“ It is your glance and not the sun that has made it bloom,” answered he, “ for it is exactly the colour of your eyes.”

“ It does not give out much scent,” went on Isabella, as she placed the chilly bloom in her bosom, “ because it is cold.”

A few minutes later she drew it forth, breathed in its scent, and handed it to Sigognac, after having furtively kissed it.

“ Now it is giving out the loveliest perfume,” said she. “ The warmth of my bosom has made it exhale its shy, modest flower-soul.”

“ ’Tis you who have scented it,” returned Sigognac, putting the flower to his lips to snatch from it the kiss Isabella had placed there. “ Its delicate and suave odour passes all earthly scents.”



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“ Too bad,” said Isabella. “ I merely give you a flower to smell, and straightway you must indulge in concetti turned after the style of Marini—just as if, instead of being out on the open, you were in the reception-room of some illustrious *précieuse*. There is no escaping it ; you reply with a madrigal to the most commonplace remarks.”

Nevertheless, in spite of her pretended annoyance, it was plain that the young actress did not greatly object to Sigognac’s compliments, for she took his arm again, and even leaned upon it rather more than was actually necessary, considering how light was her tread as a rule, and the fact that the road at this point was as smooth as a garden walk ; which goes to prove that the most virtuous of women are not insensible to praise, and that modesty itself knows how to reward flattery.

The van was slowly ascending a fairly steep hill, at the foot of which lay a few huts, which apparently had not had the courage to ascend higher. The inhabitants had all gone into the fields to work, and there was no one by the roadside but a blind beggar, accompanied by a boy, who had remained there, no doubt, for the purpose of asking alms of travellers.



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The blind man, who seemed bowed with age, chanted through his nose a sort of lamentation, in which he mourned over his affliction and begged passers-by to have pity on him, assuring them that they would have his prayers and admission to Paradise in return for their bounty. His doleful drone had for some time become audible to Isabella and Sigognac, sounding like an importunate and disagreeable monotone as they talked of their loves. The Baron, indeed, was becoming annoyed, for it is not pleasant to have a crow croaking near when listening to a nightingale.

As they came up to the old beggar, the latter, warned by his guide, redoubled his lamentations and prayers, and in order to excite them to generosity, shook a wooden saucer in which chinked a few farthings, pennies, silver coins, and other small moneys. He had a ragged band round his head, and his back, bowed like the arch of a bridge, was covered with a thick, coarse, and very heavy brown wool blanket, better fitted for a beast of burden than for a man, and which the fellow had no doubt inherited from some mule dead of farcy or mange. The whites only of his upturned eyes showed, and looked horrible in his brown, wrinkled face, the lower part of which was concealed by a long



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gray beard, worthy of a Capuchin friar or a hermit, that came down to his waist, like the antipodes of the hair of the head. The only part of his body visible was his hands that issued from the fold of the blanket and with palsied trembling held the alms saucer. By way of proving his piety and his submission to the will of Heaven, the beggar was kneeling upon a few wisps of straw filthier than Job's famous dunghill. Pity could not help shuddering with disgust in presence of this human wreck, and the kindhearted bestowed alms, but looked away as they did so.

The lad who stood by the beggar's side had a wild and haggard mien. His features were almost wholly concealed by long black hair falling upon his cheeks; an old hat, much too large for him, and no doubt picked up in the gutter, shaded the upper part of his face, allowing the chin and mouth, with its fiercely gleaming white teeth, to show. His sole garment was a species of smock-frock, of coarse linen, much patched, through which the outline of his limbs, thin and muscular, and not devoid of a certain elegance, could be made out. His small, clean feet, stockingless and shoeless, rested red upon the cold earth.

Isabella was touched at the sight of this pitiful



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couple which united the wretchedness of old age and tender youth ; she stopped in front of the blind man, who was reciting his prayers with ever increasing volubility, his young guide's shrill voice forming an accompaniment, and felt in her pocket for a coin to bestow upon the beggar. Not finding her purse, she turned to Sigognac, and asked him to lend her a copper or two, which the Baron, notwithstanding the fact that he did not have much faith in the psalm-singing beggar, did most willingly. Like a well-bred man, he stepped forward himself and dropped the coin into the plate, in order to save Isabella from coming into contact with such vermin.

Then, instead of thanking Sigognac for the alms, the mendicant, an instant before so bowed and bent, drew himself up, to Isabella's terror, opened out his arms like a vulture flapping its wings ere it takes flight, shook out the folds of the great brown cloak under the weight of which he seemed to be sinking, drew it back to his shoulder, and cast it with a gesture very much like that of fishermen casting their nets in a river or pond. The heavy stuff spread out like a pall over Sigognac's head, upon which it fell, and hung down his body, for it was weighted along the edges, like the



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edges of a net, so that he was at one and the same time deprived of sight and breathing, and the use of his hands and feet.

The young actress, terror-stricken, endeavoured to call out, but before she could utter a single scream she felt herself lifted up with uncommon swiftness. The old blind beggar, who had suddenly, by a miracle from hell rather than from heaven, become young and keen-sighted, had seized her under the arms, while the lad had caught hold of her legs. They both remained mute, and hurried her away from the road, stopping only behind a hovel, where waited a masked man riding a vigorous-looking horse. Two other men, also masked and mounted, and armed to the teeth, were ensconced behind a wall that prevented their being seen from the road, and stood ready to aid the first in case of need.

Isabella, half-dead with fright, was placed upon the pommel of the saddle, upon a pillion formed of a cloak folded several times. The horseman passed a leather belt round her waist and his own, and having completed these preparations with a rapidity that testified to his being well used to this sort of risky business, he spurred his horse and started off at a gallop. Evidently



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the animal did not mind carrying a double load, though it is true that Isabella was a very light weight.

All this occurred in less time than it takes to write it. Sigognac was fighting to get clear of the folds of the sham mendicant's cloak, just like a retiary caught in his adversary's net. He stormed and swore, for he felt sure this was the result of some contrivance of the Duke de Vallombreuse for the purpose of getting hold of Isabella, but his struggles were in vain. Fortunately he bethought himself of drawing his dagger and slitting open the thick stuff under which he was pressed down, as the damned in Dante's poem are weighed down by copies of lead.

With two or three cuts he slashed his prison open, and like a falcon unhooded, cast a swift, piercing glance over the surrounding country. He caught sight of the ravishers cutting across the fields and apparently endeavouring to make for a small clump of wood not very far distant. The blind beggar and the boy had vanished, having probably hidden themselves in a ditch or under the bushes. But it was not such small game that Sigognac was after; casting aside his cloak, that would have hindered his speed, he hastened in pursuit of the rascals with desperate fury. He was tall, well



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knit, and cut out for a sprinter; in his youth he had often contended in trials of speed with the fastest runners among the boys of the village. The abductors, as they turned in their saddles saw the distance between them and the Baron diminishing; one of them let fly a shot at him in order to stop him, but the bullet went wide, Sigognac taking care, as he ran on, to spring now to the right, now to the left, to prevent their hitting him. The man who had charge of Isabella was doing his best to forge ahead, leaving his companions to settle Sigognac, but the girl, being placed upon the pommel of the saddle, hindered him from guiding his horse, as she kept struggling and trying to slip to the ground.

Sigognac was coming up fast, the ground being now unfavourable to the horsemen; he had drawn his sword, without stopping in his run, and carried it with the point up. But he was on foot, single-handed against three men, and his wind was beginning to fail him. He made a tremendous effort, and in three or four strides came up to the fellows who were protecting the abductor's flight. To save wasting time fighting them, he goaded with the point of his rapier the quarters of their horses three or four times, reckoning that thus



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spurred on they would in all probability make a bolt of it. Nor was he disappointed; maddened with the pain, the horses reared, lashed out with their heels, took the bit in their teeth, and in spite of the efforts of their riders to hold them in, got their heads down and started off as if the devil were after them, utterly careless of ditches and other obstacles, so that in a twinkling they were out of sight.

Breathless, his face streaming with perspiration, feeling as if his heart would burst at any moment, Sigognac at last overtook the masked man who held Isabella fast upon the horse's withers. The girl kept crying out, "Help! Sigognac, help!" "I'm coming," panted the Baron, in a broken voice and breathing hard; and with his left hand he clutched the belt that bound Isabella to the brigand. He tried hard to pull him off his saddle, as he ran by the horse's side like the equerries the Romans called *desultores*; but the rider took a harder grip with his knees, and it would have been as easy to pull off a centaur's torso as to unhorse him. At the same time he scored the flanks of his mount with his spurs to make it gallop faster, while trying to shake off Sigognac, whom he could not strike at, having as much as he could do to



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hold Isabella and keep the bridle in his hands. The horse's speed being thus interfered with, Sigognac was enabled to recover his wind in part, and he even turned the opportunity to account by attempting to run his adversary through. Fearing, however, to wound Isabella, he did not thrust hard enough, and the rider, letting go the bridle for a moment, drew a knife from his jacket, and cut the belt to which Sigognac was clinging with desperation. At the same time he drove his spurs deep into the bleeding flanks of his poor steed, and sent it flying forward with irresistible impetuosity. Sigognac, caught unawares, for he had not foreseen the trick, and having lost the support he had clung to, fell heavily on his back, still holding the leather belt. He picked himself up with the greatest agility and got hold of his sword, that had flown some yards away, but quick as he was, the brief respite had enabled the horseman to gain a lead which it was hopeless for the Baron to expect to reduce, tired as he was by his mad race and the unequal struggle.

Nevertheless, spurred on by the cries of Isabella, growing ever and ever fainter, he dashed once again in pursuit of the ravisher — the useless effort of a true man who sees the woman he loves snatched from him. He



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steadily lost ground, however, and the horseman had already reached the wood, the branches of which, though leafless, were dense enough to conceal the direction the rascal was taking.

Maddened with rage and overwhelmed with grief, Sigognac was compelled to stay his steps and to leave his dear Isabella in the clutches of the fiend; even with the aid of Herod and Scappino, who had leapt from the van at the sound of the firing, in spite of the efforts of the rascally lackey to prevent their doing so when he saw that they scented mischief, Sigognac could not succour her.

In a few words, spoken breathlessly, Sigognac informed his friends of what had happened and of the abduction of Isabella.

“Vallombreuse has a finger in the business, I’ll be bound,” said Herod. “I wonder if he got an inkling of our trip to the château de Pommereuil, and if he laid this trap for us? Nay, may not the engagement itself, with the prepayment of a large sum, have been merely a trick to lure us out of the city, where it would have been both dangerous and difficult for him to try such games? If it be so, the scoundrel who played the part of the majordomo is the greatest actor I have



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ever seen. I would have sworn the fellow was the simple-minded steward of a great house, and a very pattern of every virtue and quality. However, as there are three of us, let us search the wood in every direction to see if we cannot find a trace at least of poor Isabella, whom personally, tyrant though I am, I love more than myself. Alas! I greatly fear the innocent fly has been caught in the web of a wicked spider that will destroy her before we can rescue her from the too well woven web."

"I shall crush the life out of him," said Sigognac, stamping on the ground with his heel, as though the spider were under his foot. "I shall crush the life out of the venomous beast!"

And the fierce expression of his usually gentle and quiet face showed that this was no empty threat, but that he would do precisely what he said.

"Come," said Herod, "let us lose no more time in talk. Let us enter the wood, and examine it thoroughly. The game cannot be very far off."

And sure enough, when the party reached the other edge of the coppice, having made their way through the underbrush that caught their legs and the branches that slapped their faces, they saw a coach, with the



MALARTIC AT WORK

blinds closed, driving off at the top-speed of four post-horses urged on by the smart cracking of whips. The two horsemen whose mounts Sigognac had caused to bolt, having at last managed to regain control over them, were galloping one on each side of the coach, and leading the horse of the masked man, who had entered the carriage, no doubt to prevent Isabella raising the blinds and calling for help, or even leaping to the ground at the risk of losing her life.

Unless they had possessed the seven-league boots which Jack the Giant-Killer so cleverly stole from the ogre, it was madness to attempt to run after a coach driven at such a pace and so well escorted. All Sigognac and his companions could do was to note the direction taken by the party, though that did not promise to aid them much in recovering Isabella. The Baron did try to follow the tracks of the wheels, but the weather was dry, and the tires had left but slight marks on the hard ground. Then they were mixed up with the tracks of other carriages and chariots that had travelled over the road during the previous days. When he reached a point where four roads met, the Baron entirely lost the line, and remained more embarrassed than Hercules was between Pleasure and Virtue. The little company



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therefore returned, much put out, to the van in which the remaining members of the company were waiting for them, very anxious to know the particulars of the affair.

At the very outset of the attack the lackey had hurried on the van, although the players had kept shouting to him to stop, and when the Tyrant and Scappino, on hearing the sound of the pistol-shot, had got out in spite of him, he had spurred his horse, leapt the ditch, and bolted towards his accomplices, caring little henceforth whether the company of players reached the château de Pommereuil or not; supposing the château existed, a fact they were inclined to doubt after what had happened.

Herod inquired of an old woman who came by, carrying a faggot of wood upon her hump back, whether they were still far distant from the château de Pommereuil. The old woman answered that she did not know of any estate, village, or château of that name anywhere within a radius of many miles, and she ought to know, since she had been travelling over the countryside for seventy years in pursuit of her calling, begging and seeking a wretched livelihood on every road and byway.



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It was becoming perfectly plain that the tale of a play to be given was a trick got up by deep and clever rascals in the pay of some great lord,—Vallombreuse, undoubtedly, since he was known to be in love with Isabella,—and that the working of the plot must have called for many men and much money.

The vehicle started back towards Paris, but Sigo-gnac, Herod, and Scappino remained on the spot, intending to hire horses at the nearest village, with a view to seeking out and pursuing the abductors more efficiently.

Isabella, after seeing the Baron fall, had been carried to a clearing, taken down from the horse, and placed in the carriage, in spite of her frantic efforts to get free; the whole business not taking more than three or four minutes. Then the carriage had driven off with a thunder of wheels, like the car of Capanea across the brazen bridge. Opposite to her sat respectfully the masked man who had carried her off on his saddle-bow.

She attempted to look out of the window, but immediately the man put out his hand and stopped her. Isabella, finding herself powerless in his iron grasp, sat down again and began to cry out, in hopes of being heard by some passer-by.



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“I beg you will be quiet, Miss,” said the mysterious abductor, in the most polite manner, “and not compel me to make use of physical constraint in the case of so charming and adorable a person as you. No harm is intended you; on the contrary, your advantage alone is thought of. Do not, therefore, persist in useless revolt. If you behave quietly I shall treat you with all respect; a captive queen could not ask for more. But if you make a fuss, if you insist on calling out and seeking help that will not come, I have means to reduce you to silence. This shall stop your tongue, and this your jumping about.”

So saying he drew from his pocket a cleverly constructed gag and a long silk cord rolled up in a ball.

“It would be barbarous to make use of such a muzzle or bit on so blooming, so rosy, and so mellifluous a mouth, and rope bonds would ill suit, you must own, dainty and delicate wrists intended to be adorned with golden bracelets studded with diamonds.”

Angry and desperate though the young actress was, she had perforce to yield to these arguments, for they were unquestionably sound. Physical resistance could serve no useful purpose. Isabella, therefore, settled herself in the corner of the carriage and remained

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silent. But deep sighs broke from her, and from her lovely eyes tears rolled down upon her pale cheeks, like rain drops upon a white rose. She was thinking of the dangers to her virtue and of Sigognac's despair.

“After the hysterics come tears,” said the masked man to himself. “Matters are running their regular course. I am glad of that, for I should hate to have to act brutally to so lovely a girl.”

Crouching in her corner, Isabella cast from time to time a timid glance at her keeper, who perceived it and said to her in a voice he endeavoured to soften, though it was naturally harsh: —

“You have nothing to fear from me, Miss; I am a well-bred man, and I shall not take any liberties with you. Had fortune been kinder to me, I should certainly not have abducted you for another man’s benefit, for you are assuredly virtuous, beautiful, and talented; but the ill-will of fate sometimes compels one to deeds not wholly defensible.”

“So you confess,” said Isabella, “that you have taken money to abduct me? — a most infamous, abominable, and cruel deed.”

“Considering what I have done,” returned the masked man quite coolly, “it would be idle to deny it.



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There are, on the streets of Paris, a certain number of philosophers of my kidney. We have no passions of our own, but in return for gold we interest ourselves in the passions of others and enable these mortals to satisfy their desires by placing our talents and our courage, our brains and our strength at their service. But let us change the subject. You were delightful indeed in that last play your company gave. You recited the lines in the confession scene with unequalled grace, and I applauded you roundly. If you noticed a pair of hands that clapped like thunder, you now know they were mine.”

“ In my turn I shall say to you: drop such unseasonable compliments, and tell me whither you are taking me, against my will and in violation of law and propriety.”

“ That I may not tell you; besides, it would be of no use if I did. We are bound to secrecy, like priests and physicians; the most absolute discretion is imperative in such occult, perilous, and out of the way affairs, which are often conducted by anonymous and masked shadows. Frequently, by way of greater security, we do not even know for whom we are working, and he does not know us.”



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“So you are not aware whose hand it is that has urged you to the despicable and wicked action of abducting a young girl?”

“Whether I know it or not matters not at all, since my mouth is closed by the sense of duty. If you think of the lover you have treated worst and who is the most devoted to you, I fancy you will hit upon the man.”

Seeing that she would get nothing more out of him, Isabella refrained from again speaking to her keeper. Besides, she had not the least shadow of a doubt that Vallombreuse was the instigator of the wicked deed, for she remembered the threatening way in which, standing on the threshold of her door, on the occasion of his visit to the Rue Dauphine, he had said, “Au revoir, Miss.” Considering how determined the man was and how mad his desires, these words boded no good to her. The belief increased the terrors of the poor actress, who turned pale as she thought of the way her virtue would be attacked by that haughty lord, who was more offended than in love with her. She trusted that Sigognac’s courage would enable him to come to her assistance, but would that valiant and faithful friend manage to discover in time the hidden retreat to which her ravishers were taking her?



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“In any case,” said she to herself, “if that wicked Duke attempts to outrage me, I have Chiquita’s dagger in my bosom, and I shall sacrifice my life to my honour.”

For two hours the carriage drove on at the same pace, stopping only for a few minutes to change horses at a relay arranged for beforehand. As the blinds, which were pulled up, prevented her seeing outside, Isabella was unable to make out in what direction she was being driven. She did not know that part of the country, it is true, but had she been able to look out, she would have got her bearings in a fashion with the help of the sun. As it was, she felt herself borne away to the unknown.

Presently the sound of the wheels as they rolled over the iron-bolted beams of a drawbridge warned Isabella that she had reached her destination. She was right; the carriage stopped, the door was opened, and the masked man offered his hand to the young actress to assist her to alight.

She cast a glance around her, and saw a great court, square in form, bounded by four large connected buildings, the rich brick colour of which time had turned to a rather gloomy tone. The inner façades were pierced



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by tall, narrow windows, and through the greenish panes could be seen the closed shutters, a proof that the rooms had long been uninhabited. Every paving-stone in the court was set in a framework of moss, and the grass was growing at the foot of some of the walls. At the base of the outer steps two sphinxes, modelled in the Egyptian style, stretched out their blunted claws upon their pedestals, their quarters stained with the gray and yellow leprous lichens that grow upon old stones. Nevertheless, in spite of the mournful look characteristic of dwellings uninhabited by their owners, the place had a very aristocratic appearance. It was deserted, not abandoned, and no trace of decay was visible; the body was whole; the soul only was wanting.

The masked man handed Isabella over to the care of a lackey in a gray livery, who led her up a broad staircase, the balustrade of which was richly ornamented with the scroll-work and arabesques in wrought iron that had been the fashion in the reign of the late king. He introduced her into an apartment that had no doubt been formerly a model of luxury, and which in its faded richness was quite equal to the most elegant of modern suites. The walls of the first room



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were wainscotted with old oak, the design representing architectural forms, pilasters, cornices, and frames of carved foliage filled with Flanders tapestries. In the next room, which was also panelled in oak, though the ornamentation was richer and set off with gilding, the tapestries were replaced by allegorical paintings, the meaning of which it was rather difficult to make out under the thick coating of smoke and the layers of yellow varnish. The darker parts were undistinguishable, and only the lighter portions could be made out. The effect produced by the figures of divinities, nymphs, and heroes that half emerged from the shadows and of which only the luminous parts showed, was strange indeed, and in the evening, in the dim light of the lamps, became almost terrifying.

The bed stood in a deep alcove, and was covered with a counterpane of tapestry wrought most delicately in fine stitches, and striped with bands of velvet. It was a magnificent piece of work, but the colouring was dulled. Threads of gold and silver gleamed amid the faded silks and wools, and bluish blotches shimmered on the surface of the stuff, that had once been red. On a marvellously carved dressing-table stood a Venetian mirror in which Isabella was able to note the pallor



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and the change in her features due to her distress. A large fire, a token that the young actress's arrival was expected, was burning on the hearth, the mantel of which was a huge piece of stone-work, supported by Hermes ending in cases, and laden with volutes, brackets, wreaths, and ornaments rather heavy in design, and in the centre of which was set the portrait of a man whose expression struck Isabella. The face was somewhat familiar to her; she recalled it vaguely, as one recalls faces seen in dreams that, instead of vanishing when one awakens, keep haunting one in real life. It was a pale face, with dark eyes, red lips, and brown hair,—the face of a man of forty, and stamped with aristocratic pride. The man wore a burnished steel breastplate, inlaid with gold ornaments and crossed by a white scarf. In spite of her preoccupation, and of the very natural terror she felt at being where she was, Isabella could not help looking at the portrait, and her eyes constantly returned to it as if it exercised a fascination upon her. The features had some resemblance to those of Vallombreuse, but their expression was so different that the likeness speedily vanished.

She was still sunk in reverie when the lackey in gray livery, who had left her for a moment, returned with a



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couple of valets bearing a table laid for one person and said to the prisoner : —

“ Dinner is served, Madam.”

One of the valets silently placed an arm-chair for her, and the other removed the cover of the tureen of old massive silver, from which rose a cloud of odorous steam that told of a most succulent broth.

Isabella was in deep distress, yet she felt very hungry, and was annoyed with herself on that account, just as if nature did not assert its rights under any circumstances ; reflecting, however, that the dish might contain some narcotic intended to render her helpless against outrage, she stopped and pushed back the plate in which she already dipped her spoon.

The lackey in the gray livery appeared to divine her fear, and tasted, in her presence, the water, wine, and dishes placed upon the table. Somewhat reassured, the captive took some of the soup, ate a little bread and a wing of the chicken ; after which, feeling somewhat nervous in consequence of the agitation she had undergone during the day, she drew her chair to the fire and remained there for a time, her elbow resting on the arm of the chair and supporting her chin in her hand, and her mind filled with vague apprehensions.



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Then she rose and drew near to the window to see what lay outside. There was neither bar, grating, nor anything suggestive of a prison, but when she bent forward and looked down, she saw, at the foot of the wall the greenish, stagnant waters of a deep moat that ran round the château. The drawbridge which she had crossed in the carriage was raised, and unless a man were to swim the moat, there was no means of establishing communications with the outer world. Even then it would have been exceedingly difficult to climb up the perpendicular stone revetment wall of the moat. The view beyond was closed in completely by a sort of boulevard, formed of trees of very great age, planted the whole way round the château. From the windows there was nothing visible save the interlaced branches, which, though leafless, prevented the sight from travelling far. There was evidently no hope of flight or rescue, and all she could do was to await the issue; a condition of things more wearing in its anxiety than the catastrophe itself.

Poor Isabella started at the least sound; the murmur of the waters, the soughing of the wind, the creaking of the wood-work, the crackling of the fire, sufficed to make a cold sweat break out all over her. She ex-



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pected every minute to see a door or a panel open, revealing a secret passage, and in the dark opening *something*, man or phantom. Indeed, she would probably have dreaded the phantom less. As the twilight deepened, her terror increased, and when a tall lackey entered, bearing a candelabrum filled with lighted tapers, she nearly swooned away.

While Isabella was trembling with fear in her solitary apartment, her abductors, in a room on the lower floor, were carousing and feasting ; they were to remain in the château and to garrison it, in the event of Sigo-gnac leading an attack against it. Every man Jack of them was drinking like a fish, but one of them far surpassed his fellows in his capacity for holding liquor. It was the man who had carried off Isabella upon his horse, and as he had now laid aside his mask, it was easy for any one to gaze upon his chalky face, in the middle of which flamed a very red nose. The blazing proboscis enabled one readily to recognise Malartic, Lampourde's friend.

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XVI

VALLOMBREUSE

ISABELLA, left alone in a strange room, in which danger might assail her at any moment in some mysterious form, was filled with inexpressible anguish, though her wandering life had trained her to be more courageous than the ordinary run of women. Yet there was nothing sinister in the old-fashioned but well-preserved elegance of the place. The flames played brightly upon the enormous logs on the hearth, and the tapers cast a dazzling light that filled even the most remote corners and dispelled both the darkness and the creations of fear. The room was pleasantly warm, and everything in it invited her to enjoy her leisure in comfort. The paintings in the panels were too brilliantly lighted to look fantastic, and the portrait of the man over the mantelpiece, in its carved frame, which Isabella had noticed, had not that fixed look which seems to follow one everywhere, and which is peculiarly disturbing in the case of some portraits. It



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rather seemed to smile quietly and protectingly, like the face of a saint that may be invoked in times of danger. Yet the concourse of peaceful, reassuring, and hospitable things failed to relieve the nervous strain under which Isabella was labouring. Her nerves were as highly strung as the cords of a guitar; her quick, anxious glance wandered restlessly around, seeking to see and fearing to see, while her over-sharpened senses noticed with terror, in the deep silence of the night, the faint sounds that are the voice of silence. And Heaven knows what dreadful meanings she attached to them !

{ Ere long she became so wrought up that she resolved to leave the brightly lighted, warm, and comfortable room, and to venture through the passages of the château, even at the risk of meeting something dreadful, to see whether she could not discover some unguarded egress or some place of refuge. Having made sure that the doors of her room were not double-locked, she took from the side-table the lamp the lackey had left there for the night, and shielding the flame with her hand she started.

She first came upon the staircase with the rich balustrade up which she had been shown by the servant,



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and she proceeded to descend it, reasoning correctly that there could be no egress on the first floor that would help her to escape. At the foot of the stairs, under the vestibule, she saw a great door, with two leaves, and turned the handle. The door opened with much creaking of wood and hinges that seemed to her to sound as loud as thunder, although in reality it was inaudible three yards away. The feeble flame of the lamp sputtering in the damp air of a room which had long remained closed up, revealed to the young actress, or rather enabled her to perceive indistinctly, a very large room, not in disrepair certainly, but bearing all the ear-marks of a place that has been uninhabited for a long time. Against the walls, hung with tapestries containing figures, were placed great oaken settles ; trophies of arms, gauntlets, swords, and bucklers were suspended around, and flashed out unexpectedly. A heavy table with massive legs, against which the girl nearly bumped, stood in the middle of the room. She walked round it, and was terrified, on approaching the door opposite the entrance, and which led into the next room, to see suddenly two figures, armed from head to foot, standing motionless on sentry on either side of the door, their gauntleted hands crossed upon the hilts



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of their mighty swords, the points of which rested on the ground. The beavers of their helms represented hideous birds' faces, the eyeholes simulating the eyes, and the nose-guards the beaks. On the helms rose, like angry fluttering wings, plates of iron fashioned in the form of feathers. The lower part of the breast-plates, reflecting a point of light, swelled in strangest fashion as though heaving and falling with the deep breathing of the wearers, while from the knee and the elbow pieces jutted a steel point, curved like an eagle's talon, and the end of the feet plates turned up like a claw. In the quivering light of the lamp held in Isabella's trembling hand, the two steel panoplies assumed a truly alarming appearance, well calculated to startle the most courageous. It was no wonder, then, the girl's heart beat so loud that she could hear it at the same time that she felt its pulsations in her throat; and bitterly did she repent having left her room to start on this nocturnal expedition of hers.

Finding, however, that the warriors did not move, although they could not have failed to notice her presence, and that they made no sign that they were about to brandish their swords and bar her farther progress, she drew near one of them and held the light



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close to his face. The man-at-arms was in no wise disturbed by her action, and maintained his position with perfect unconcern. Isabella, emboldened, for she began to suspect the truth of the matter, raised his visor, which, when opened, merely showed the void of shadow. The two sentries were simply panoplies, curious German suits of armour, placed upon lay figures. But a poor prisoner wandering through a solitary castle at night, might well be excused for having mistaken them for men, so closely do these iron shells, fitted to the human body like statues of war, recall the human shape even when they stand empty, and indeed become more formidable on account of the sharpness of their angles and the bosses on the joints. In spite of her anxiety, Isabella could not keep back a smile when she saw how she had deceived herself, and like the heroes of tales of chivalry, once they have, by means of a talisman, broken the spell that prevented access to an enchanted castle, she bravely made her way into the farther hall without bestowing a thought upon the henceforth powerless pair of guardians.

It proved to be a vast dining-room, with high dressers of carved oak, on which faintly gleamed masses of silver plate: ewers, salt-cellars, spice-boxes,



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bowls, swelling vases, and great dishes of silver or silver-gilt, the size of bucklers or chariot-wheels, and Bohemian and Venetian glass, of slender and fanciful shapes, that flashed blue, green, or red as the light fell upon it. Square-backed chairs were ranged round the table, apparently awaiting guests that would never come, but at night they might have served ghosts assembled to banquet together. The walls were panelled half-way up, and above the paneling were hung with old Cordova leather, goffered with gilt and patterned with flowers. As the light of the lamp fell upon it, it showed tawny and imparted to the darkness a warm and sombre richness. Isabella glanced at all this splendour, and hastened to pass through the third door.

This led into a third room which appeared to be the state drawing-room, for it was larger than the other halls, themselves of considerable size. The feeble light of the lamp failed to illumine its depths, and it died away, a short distance in front of Isabella, in yellow filaments like the rays of a star seen through a mist. Faint though it was, it nevertheless sufficed to make the darkness visible, and to give to the shadows monstrous and terrifying shapes, uncouth outlines filled in by fear. Phantoms seemed to be draping themselves



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in the curtains, the arms of the chairs to be embracing spectres, while hideous larvæ were crouching in the corners, grimly coiled up on themselves, or hanging to the walls with bat-like claws.

Overcoming these terrors of the imagination, Isabella kept on her way, and saw at the end of the hall a lordly dais topped with plumes, and covered with coats of arms which it would have been difficult to make out, surmounting an arm-chair in the form of a throne, placed upon a carpeted platform reached by three steps. But it was all indistinct, confusedly seen, sunk in shadow, and revealed only by a chance gleam, and thus was invested with the grim, colossal grandeur of mysteriousness. The throne might have been intended for the presiding spirit of a Sanhedrim of spirits, and it required no great effort of the imagination to believe that a dark angel with vast black wings was seated upon it.

Isabella moved on faster, and the creaking of her shoes, light as was her step, sounded terribly loud in the silence.

The fourth room was a bedroom, partly filled with a huge bed with dark-red Indian damask curtains draping it about. Between the bed and the wall gleamed a

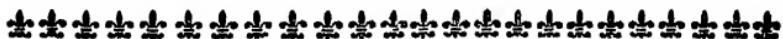


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silver crucifix above an ebony prie-Dieu. Even in the daytime, a bed curtained in has a suspicious look ; one cannot help wondering what there is behind the drawn curtains ; and at night, in a deserted room a closely curtained bed becomes terrifying, for who is to know that it does not conceal a dead body or a living creature on the watch ? Isabella thought she could hear the deep and regular breathing of a sleeper behind the closed curtains. Was it really so, or was it merely a fancy of hers ? At all events, she had not the courage to make sure by flashing the light of her lamp between the folds of the red hangings.

Beyond the bedroom lay the library. In the cases, surmounted by busts of poets, philosophers, and historians that gazed upon Isabella with their great white eyes, numerous volumes, in disarray, exhibited their backs lettered with titles and figures, the gilding of which reflected the light of the lamp.

At this point the building formed a right angle, and the library thus opened into a long gallery running along another façade of the buildings looking out upon the court-yard. It was the gallery in which the family portraits were hung in chronological order. A row of windows ran opposite the wall on which they hung in



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their rusty gilded frames. The windows were closed with shutters, in the upper part of each of which was cut an oval aperture, the cause, at that particular moment, of a peculiar effect. The moon had risen, and its beams reproduced the aperture in the form of an oval of light upon the opposite wall. It happened in some cases that this oval spot of bluish light fell upon the face of one of the portraits and formed a sort of whitish mask for it. Illumined by this strange light, the portrait appeared to be startlingly alive; the more so that, the rest of the body being lost in the shadow, the head, with its silvery pallor brought out suddenly into relief, looked like a carved face starting from its frame to watch Isabella pass by. Others, lighted merely by the reflection of the lamp, preserved under the yellow varnish their solemn, death-like attitude, but they were not the least sinister in the collection, for the souls of the ancestors they represented appeared to be gazing out of the dark eyes as through openings made for that special purpose.

Isabella displayed, while traversing this gallery hung with fantastic faces, as much genuine courage as does a soldier who marches forward under the fire of the enemy. A cold sweat moistened her chemisette



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between her shoulders, and she could not keep back the conviction that the phantoms in cuirasses and doublets covered with orders of knighthood, and the dowagers with huge ruffs and extravagant farthingales had got down from their frames and were following her in funereal procession. She even fancied she heard the shuffling of their shadowy steps upon the floor behind her.

At last she reached the end of the wide gallery, and came upon a glazed door leading into the court. She opened it, hurting her fingers somewhat in the operation of turning the old rusty key in the lock, and taking care to place her lamp where she could easily find it on her return, she emerged from the gallery, the abode of terror and of nocturnal illusions.

On beholding the open sky, in which twinkled a few silvery stars the light of the moon had not eclipsed, Isabella experienced a sensation of deep and delightful joy, as if she were returning from death into life. She fancied that God could now see her from His firmament, for He might well have forgotten her when she was lost in the dense darkness, under the heavy ceilings and in the maze of rooms and passages. While her condition was in no way bettered, she felt



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as if a heavy burden had been lifted from her heart. She continued her exploration, but found that the court was carefully closed in at every point, like the outer wall of a fortress, save where a postern or brick arch opened out, upon the moat, probably, for Isabella, on bending forward, felt the humid coolness of the deep waters strike her like a breath of wind, and heard the faint lipping of the ripples against the foot of the wall. This was probably the passage through which provisions were brought into the château, but to approach or to leave it a boat was needed, and this, no doubt, was secured at the foot of the rampart or in some basin beyond her reach.

Escape, therefore, was as impossible in this direction as in every other, and this fact accounted for the relative liberty she enjoyed as a prisoner. Her cage was left open, like that of exotic birds transported on ships, for the men well know that the birds will be forced to return and perch in the rigging after a short flight, as the nearest land is so far distant that they would be tired out ere they reached it. The moat around the castle answered the purpose of the ocean around the ship.

In one corner of the court a ray of reddish light



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filtered through the shutters of a lower room in a dark corner, and sounds issued from it into the silence of night. The young girl proceeded in the direction of the light and the sound, impelled by a very natural curiosity. Looking through the crack of one of the shutters, less well closed than the others, she easily made out what was going on inside.

Round a table lighted by a three-branched lamp, hung from the ceiling by a brass chain, a number of fellows of fierce and truculent mien were roystering. Isabella easily recognised among them, though she had seen them with masks on only, the scoundrels who had abducted her. They were Piedgris, Tordgueule, La Râpée and Bringuenarilles, whose personal appearance corresponded fitly with these lovely appellations. The light falling from above shone on their brows, shadowed their eyes, brought out the ridge of their noses, and touched up their huge mustaches in a way that still further exaggerated the savage look of their faces, which did not need to be thus made still more frightful. Somewhat apart from them, at the end of the table, was seated, as being a country brigand not yet entitled to rank with Paris ruffians, Agostino, who had removed the false beard and wig he had used in



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playing his part of a blind beggar. In the place of honour was enthroned Malartic, unanimously elected ruler of the feast. His face was paler and his nose redder than usual, a phenomenon accounted for by the array of empty bottles ranged on the dresser like the bodies of the dead borne away from the scene of battle, and by the number of full bottles which the cellarer placed in front of him with indefatigable alacrity.

In the confused conversation of the topers, Isabella caught here and there a few words the meaning of which she could not fathom, for they were expressions drawn from the slang of gambling hells, wine-shops, and fencing-rooms, sometimes even from the hideous slang of the Court of Miracles, where are spoken the tongues of Egypt and of Bohemia. She could make out nothing that bore upon her situation, or the fate that awaited her, and feeling chilly, she was about to withdraw, when Malartic called for silence with such a tremendous blow upon the table that the bottles rocked as though drunk and the glasses clattered one against another with a crystalline tinkling answering to the C, E, G, B of the musical scale. The topers, pretty well drunk as they were, started on their benches, and every mug was straightway turned towards Malartic.



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Profiting by this break in the tumult of the orgy, Malartic rose and said, as he raised his glass and made the wine in it sparkle in the light like the stone in a ring : —

“ Lads, listen to this song which I have written, for I handle the lyre as cleverly as the sword. It is a drinking-song, as behooves a jolly toper. The fishes drink water, so they are deprived of speech ; if they were to drink wine, they would sing. Therefore let us show that we are men by seasoning our drink with melody.”

“ Song ! song ! ” yelled Bringuenarilles, La Râpée, Tordgueule and Piedgris, who were utterly unable to follow such subtle dialectics.

Malartic cleared his throat with a repeated “ Hum ! hum ! ” and with all the airs and graces of a singer summoned to perform in the King’s chamber, began to sing in a harsh voice, though in tune, the following couplets : —

“ To Bacchus, toper illustrious,
We shout ‘ Hail ! ’ and sing together.
Hurrah for the pure juice of the vine
That flows from the grapes when pressed !
Hurrah for its liquid rubies !



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“ We who are priests of the vine,
We wear the colours of the wine.
The bottle 't is that holds our rouge,
Wherewith we make our faces red
And blossoms rosy on our nose.

“ Down with the man who water drinks,
Instead of wine both cool and strong !
Let him to the pint stoup kneel,
Or from a man to frog transformed,
Go sputter about in muddy swamp ! ”

The song was received with shouts of approval, and Tordgueule, who piqued himself on being a connoisseur of poetry, did not hesitate to proclaim Malartic the equal of Saint-Amant, a fact which goes to show how completely intoxication marred the gentleman's judgment. A bumper was ordered in honour of the singer, and when the glasses had been drained, every man upset his to show he had left no heel-taps and had conscientiously put away the whole of the liquor. This proved fatal to the weaker heads in the company : La Râpée slid under the table, where Bringuenarilles found him useful as a mattress. Piedgris and Tordgueule, being more seasoned topers, merely let their heads fall forward and fell asleep with their crossed



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arms for pillows. As for Malartic, he sat straight up in his chair, his glass in his hand, his eyes staring, and his nose so brilliantly red that it seemed to send out sparks like a piece of iron fresh drawn from the forge fire. He kept repeating mechanically, with the solemn stupidity of a drunkard, and without any one joining in the chorus:—

“ To Bacchus, toper illustrious,
We shout ‘ Hail! ’ and sing together. . . . ”

Disgusted with the sight, Isabella left the chink in the shutter and proceeded with her investigations, and thus came to the archway under which the chains and counterweights of the drawbridge, now raised, were placed. It was useless for her to attempt to work the heavy machinery, and as it was necessary to lower the drawbridge in order to get out, the captive saw herself compelled to give up all hope of escape. She returned to the place where she had left her lamp in the portrait gallery, and traversed the latter with less terror than before, for she was now acquainted with the cause of her former fears, and it is of the mystery of the unknown that fear is made up.

She passed quickly through the library, the state



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drawing-room, and every apartment which she had previously gone through cautiously and timidly. The panoplies that had so terrified her now struck her as almost comical, and it was with deliberate steps that she ascended the stairs down which she had come a short time before with bated breath and lightest tread, lest she should awaken the faintest of echoes within the sonorous place.

Great was her terror, however, on entering her room, to perceive a strange figure seated by the fire-place. It was unquestionably no phantom, for the light of the tapers and of the fire illumined it too plainly to allow of the least doubt on the subject. It was a girl, of slender and delicate frame, it is true, but uncommonly alive, as was proved by the two great black eyes, the fierce glance of which, utterly unlike the lack-lustre glance of a spectre, was fixed with fascinating tranquillity upon Isabella, as she stood at the door. The girl's long brown hair, thrown back enabled every detail of her olive-complexioned face to be clearly seen; her thin features were bright and youthful, and her parted lips exhibited a splendid set of teeth; her hands, browned by the open air, but daintily shaped, were crossed on her bosom, and the



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nails showed of a paler colour than the fingers. Her bare feet did not reach the ground, for her legs were not long enough to let them touch the floor when she was seated in a chair. Through the opening of a coarse linen shirt gleamed faintly the pearls of a necklace.

This necklace has enabled the reader to recognise Chiquita, and indeed it was she, still in the boy's dress, instead of that proper to her sex, which she had assumed to play the part of guide to the sham blind mendicant. The costume, which consisted of a shirt and wide breeches, became her very well, for she was at the age when it is difficult to tell a girl from a young boy.

As soon as she recognised the strange creature, Isabella recovered from the fright she had felt on beholding the unexpected apparition. Chiquita was not very formidable in herself, aside from the fact that she appeared to entertain for the young actress a sort of queer and fantastic gratitude, of which she had once already given proof.

Chiquita, while looking at Isabella, was humming the prose song she had hummed in wild fashion, with her body half in, half out of the round window, on the occasion of the first attempt to abduct Isabella at the



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inn,—“Chiquita dances on top of railings; Chiquita slips through keyholes.”

“Have you still got your knife?” said the queer girl to Isabella when the latter had drawn near the mantelpiece. “I mean the knife with the three red grooves.”

“Yes, Chiquita,” returned the young woman. “I carry it here, between my shift and my bodice. But why do you ask? Is my life in danger?”

“A knife,” answered the child, with glistening, fierce glance, “a knife is a true friend, that does not betray its master if the latter gives it drink; for a knife grows thirsty.”

“You frighten me, you wicked girl,” said Isabella, moved by these words so sinister in their extravagance, but that, considering the situation she found herself in, might well be intended for a useful warning.

“Sharpen its point upon the marble of the chimney-piece,” went on Chiquita, “and strop the blade upon the sole of your shoe.”

“Why do you advise me to do that?” asked the actress, now very pale.

“For no reason whatever. But those who want to defend themselves make their arms ready.”



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These strange and disquieting remarks troubled Isabella, but, on the other hand, Chiquita's presence in her room reassured her. The child seemed to feel for her a sort of affection, which, though springing from a trifling cause, was none the less genuine. "I shall never cut your throat," Chiquita had said, and untamed though she was, this constituted a solemn promise, a treaty of alliance which she must not fail to carry out. Isabella was the one and only human creature, save Agostino, who had ever taken any kindly interest in her. Isabella it was who had given her the first piece of finery that had gratified her childish love of show, and as she was yet too young to feel jealousy, she artlessly admired the beauty of the young actress, whose face fairly fascinated her, the more that till then she had seen only drawn, ferocious faces that spoke of rapine, revolt, and murder.

"How comes it that you are here?" said Isabella, after a moment's silence. "Are you charged to keep watch over me?"

"No," answered Chiquita. "I came by myself, guided by the light and the fire. I was tired of sitting in a corner while the men were drinking down bottle after bottle of wine. I am so small, so young, and so



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thin that no more notice is taken of me than of a cat asleep under the table. I made my way out when the din was at its worst. I hate the smell of wine and food, for I am used to the perfume of the heather and the resinous scent of the pines."

"And are you not afraid of wandering alone without a light through the long, dark corridors and the great rooms full of shadows?"

"Chiquita does not know what fear is; she can see in the dark and walk in it without stumbling. If I come upon an owl, the owl closes its eyes; if I meet a bat it folds up its membranes as I draw near. Phantoms stand aside to let me pass, or else they withdraw. Night is my comrade and conceals nothing from me. I know where are the owl's nest, the robber's hiding-place, the grave where the murdered man is buried, and the spot haunted by the spectre, but none of these secrets have I ever revealed to Day."

As she uttered these strange words, Chiquita's eyes burned with supernatural fire, and it was easy to see that, her mind having been excited by solitude, the child believed herself possessed of magic powers. The scenes of brigandage and murder she had witnessed from childhood had deeply impressed her ardent, un-



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trained, and feverish imagination. Her absolute belief in herself reacted upon Isabella, who gazed upon her with superstitious apprehension.

“I like a good deal better to remain here by the fire with you,” went on the little girl. “You are beautiful, and I enjoy looking at you. You are like the Blessed Virgin I saw on the altar; from a distance only, though, for they drove me from the church with the dogs, saying that my hair was unkempt and that my canary-yellow skirt would make the faithful laugh. How white your hands are! When I lay mine on them, they look like a monkey’s paws. Your hair is fine as silk, and mine sticks out like a thorn-bush. I am dreadfully ugly, am I not?”

“No, my dear little one,” returned Isabella, touched in spite of herself by the child’s artless admiration. “You are beautiful in your own way, and all you need is to be dressed up a little bit to look as lovely as the handsomest girls.”

“Do you mean it? Then I shall steal some fine clothes to dress myself up in, and Agostino shall love me.”

And at the thought the child’s tawny face flushed rosy red, and she remained for a time sunk in a deep, delightful reverie.



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“Do you know where we are?” went on Isabella when Chiquita raised again her long, dark lashes she had lowered for a moment.

“In a castle that belongs to the nobleman who has so much money, and who tried to have you carried off in Poictiers. All I had to do then was to draw the bolt, and they would have had you. But you had given me the pearl necklace, and I would not give you pain.”

“Yet this time you helped to carry me off,” said Isabella. “Do you not love me any more, then, that you hand me over to my enemies?”

“Agostino ordered me to help, and I had to obey. Besides, if I had not come, some one else would have acted as guide to the blind man, and I could not have made my way into the castle with you. Here, I can be of use to you; I am courageous, agile, and strong, though I am small, and I will not have you harmed.”

“Is this castle, where I am kept a prisoner, very far from Paris?” asked Isabella, drawing the girl to her lap. “Have you heard any of the men say what the name of it is?”

“Yes; Tordgueule said the place was called—Let me see. What did he call it?” answered the child, evidently puzzled.



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“ Try to remember it, my dear,” said Isabella stroking Chiquita’s brown cheeks, and thus causing the girl, whom no one had ever petted, to flush with pleasure.

“ I think it is Vallombreuse,” said she, speaking the words in syllables as if listening to a voice within. “ Yes, I am sure of it now ; it *is* Vallombreuse ; the name of the nobleman your friend Captain Fracasse wounded in a duel. He had better have killed him, for the Duke is a very bad man, even though he does scatter gold in handfuls like a sower scatters grain. You hate him, don’t you, and you would dearly like to get away from him ? ”

“ Indeed I would, but it is impossible,” said the young actress. “ There is a deep moat round the château, and the drawbridge is raised. It is hopeless to attempt to escape.”

“ Chiquita laughs at gratings and locks, at walls and moats. Chiquita can escape when she pleases from the best-guarded prison, and fly up to the moon before the eyes of the astounded gaoler. If Chiquita liked, the Captain would know before the sun rises again, where is hidden the woman he is looking for.”

Isabella concluded, as she listened to these words, that the child was crazy, but her face was quite calm,



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her eyes shone clear, and she spoke with such an accent of conviction that this explanation was inadmissible. The strange creature certainly possessed, in part at least, the almost magical power she claimed.

As if to convince Isabella that she was not making any empty boasts, Chiquita said to her:—

“I shall leave this place presently; let me think a minute and find a way to do it. Do not speak, and hold your breath; the least noise disturbs me, and I have to listen to the Spirit.”

She bowed her head, put her hands over her eyes in order to abstract herself, remained for a few moments in absolute immobility, then looked up, opened the window, climbed upon the sill, and looked intently out into the darkness. At the foot of the wall was heard the lapping of the dark waters of the moat ruffled by the night breeze.

“I wonder if she is going to take flight like a bat,” said the young actress to herself as she followed Chiquita’s motions.

Opposite the window, on the farther side of the moat, rose a high tree, centuries old, the great boughs of which extended horizontally partly over the ground and partly over the moat, though the extremity of the



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nearest of them was quite eight or nine feet from the wall. It was by means of this tree that Chiquita proposed to escape. She stepped back into the room, drew from one of her pockets a very fine, very closely plaited hair-rope, forty to fifty feet long, unrolled it carefully on the floor, drew from another pocket a sort of hook, which she fitted to one end of the cord, returned to the window, and hove the hook into the branches of the tree. At the first attempt the iron hook failed to catch, and fell back with the rope, striking the wall with a clang; but at the second trial the sharp point struck in the bark, and Chiquita pulled the rope taut, begging Isabella to hang on to it with all her weight. The branch she had harpooned yielded as much as the flexibility of the trunk allowed, and was drawn five or six feet nearer the window. Then Chiquita made the rope fast to the iron-work of the balcony by a knot that would not slip, and hanging to the rope, she went with marvellous agility hand over hand to the branch, which she bestrode as soon as she felt it solid under her.

“Now cast off the knot, so that I can pull the rope over,” she said to the prisoner in a low but clear voice, “unless you would like to come out the same way. I fancy, though, that you would feel frightened, and that



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dizziness would make you fall into the moat. Good-bye; I am off to Paris, and I shall soon be back, for it is moonlight, and I can walk fast."

Isabella did as she was bidden, and the tree, no longer held, resumed its normal position and transported Chiquita to the other side of the ditch. In less than a minute, using her knees and hands, she had reached the bottom of the oak, and the captive saw her making off at a rapid pace, and soon lost sight of her in the bluish shadows of the night.

All that had just occurred seemed to Isabella like a dream. Half-stupefied, she had not yet closed the window, and was looking at the motionless tree, the bare branches of which showed black against the milky gray of a cloud interpenetrated by the diffused light of the orb of the moon, which it partially concealed. She shuddered as she noted how slender at its extremity was the branch to which the agile and courageous Chiquita had not hesitated to trust her life. She was moved at the thought of the affection shown for her by this wretched, wild girl, who had such lovely eyes, so bright and so passionate, the eyes of a woman in the face of a girl, and who showed such gratitude for so trifling a gift. But as she began to feel the damp, and her little



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pearly teeth were beginning to chatter, she closed the sash, drew the curtains, and settled down in an arm-chair by the fire, her feet resting upon the brass balls on the andirons.

Scarcely had she seated herself when the majordomo entered, followed by the same two valets bearing a small table covered with a rich damasked cloth with lace fringe, on which was laid out a supper no less delicate and exquisite than the dinner had been. Had these men come in a few minutes earlier, Chiquita could not have got away. Isabella, still much agitated, did not touch the dishes set before her, and signed that she wished them to be removed. The majordomo caused to be placed by the bedside a tray on which were marchpane cakes and blancmange; and on an arm-chair a gown, cap, and dressing-wrapper heavily trimmed with lace, by one of the fashionable dress-makers. Great logs were thrown upon the mass of burning coals, and new tapers lighted. Then he informed Isabella that if she needed the services of a maid, one would be sent to her.

The young actress having signed that she wished no one, the majordomo withdrew, bowing most respectfully.



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When the man and the lackeys had withdrawn, Isabella, throwing the wrapper around her shoulders, lay down fully dressed upon the bed, but not under the sheets, in order to be promptly up in case of alarm. She drew Chiquita's knife from her bosom, opened it, turned the ferule, and placed it within reach of her hand. Having taken these precautions, she closed her eyes and tried to sleep, but she found it hard to do so. Her nerves were upset by the occurrences of the day, and the fears of night were not calculated to reassure her. Besides, old uninhabited castles have a strange look during the hours of darkness; one feels as if one were disturbing some one in them, and as if an invisible host disappears, as one draws near, through a secret passage in the wall. All manner of inexplicable faint noises make themselves heard unexpectedly. A piece of furniture creaks; a death-beetle raps in the wood-work, a rat scampers behind the arras, a worm-eaten log explodes on the fire like a shell in a display of fireworks and wakes one up just as one is falling into a doze. This is just what happened to the young prisoner; she would start up with staring eyes, and look around the room; then, failing to notice anything out of the way, she would let her head sink again upon



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the pillow. Sleep at last did lay hold of her sufficiently to separate the world of reality—the sounds of which ceased to reach her—from the land of dreams. Had Vallombreuse been there, he would have had a rare opportunity of satisfying his lust, for fatigue had rendered Isabella dead to all sensation. Happily for her, the young Duke had not yet reached the castle. This was not due to his having ceased to desire his prey now that he held it safe in his den, or to his passion having evaporated now that he was sure of being able to gratify it. He was much too tenacious of purpose, especially in evil, was the young and handsome Duke; and he took a certain perverse delight, outside of voluptuousness, in making a mock of all human and divine laws. The reason of his delay was that, in order to divert suspicion from himself when the abduction should become known, he had repaired that very day to Saint-Germain, had paid his court to the King, had followed the chase, and quietly talked to a number of people. In the evening he had gambled and lost, in the sight of all, sums so large that they would have meant much to any one less wealthy than he was. He had appeared to be in the best of temper, especially after having received a letter which a retainer of his had handed to



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him with a deep bow, and which the man had brought at the top speed of his horse. It was the need of making absolutely certain that he could prove an alibi, in case an inquiry were set on foot, that had saved Isabella's virtue that night.

Her sleep was filled with disturbing dreams; at times she saw Chiquita running in front of Captain Fracasse, who was on horseback, and waving her arms like wings; at others she saw the Duke de Vallombreuse, his eyes flashing hatred and lust. At last she awoke, and was greatly surprised to find how long she had slept. The tapers had burned down to the sockets, the fire had gone out, and a bright ray of sunshine, entering in between the curtains, had taken the liberty of playing upon her couch, notwithstanding the fact that it had not been duly presented to her. The young girl felt greatly relieved at seeing the daylight. It was true that the danger of her position was in no wise diminished by it, but at all events that danger was not magnified by the mysterious terror which the bravest feel at night and in the presence of the unknown. Her content was short-lived, however, for the creaking of chains was heard, the drawbridge was lowered, the rattling of a carriage driven at full speed sounded upon



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the planking, echoed under the archway like distant thunder, and died away in the inner court.

Plainly no one but the lord of the manor, the Duke de Vallombreuse in person, would enter in so masterful and haughty a fashion, and Isabella knew instinctively, as the dove knows that the hawk is soaring near, though it is still invisible, that the new-comer could be none else than her foe. Her lovely cheeks turned pale as wax, and her poor little heart beat an alarm in the fortress of her bodice, though it had no intention of surrendering. Soon, however, she mastered herself, and courageously prepared for the inevitable combat.

“If only Chiquita has managed to reach Paris in time and to bring me help!” she said, involuntarily looking at the portrait in the centre of the mantelpiece. “Do you, who look so noble and so good, protect me against the insolence and the wickedness of your descendant. Do not allow this place, in which your image shines, to witness the wreck of my honour!”

An hour elapsed, which the young Duke employed in repairing the disorder caused in his dress by the rapidity of his trip. Then the majordomo entered ceremoniously, and inquired of Isabella whether she



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would do the Duke de Vallombreuse the honour of receiving him.

“I am a prisoner,” answered the young woman, with much dignity, “and my reply is fettered like my person. Such a request, which would be courteous in ordinary circumstances, is derisive in my present condition. I am unable to prevent his lordship entering this room, which I have no means of leaving. I do not grant him permission to visit me; I have to put up with his doing so; I am helpless. Let him come, if he desires to do so, now or at any other time; it is a matter of indifference to me. Bear my words to him.”

The majordomo bowed and withdrew, walking backwards, for he had received orders to treat Isabella with the greatest respect, and went to inform his master that the lady consented to receive him.

He returned in a few moments, and announced the Duke de Vallombreuse.

Isabella had half risen from her chair, but fell back deadly pale. Vallombreuse approached her, hat in hand, with every mark of the deepest respect. Seeing her shudder at his approach, he stopped half-way, bowed, and said in the tone that he knew so well how to render seductive: —



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“If my presence be yet too painful to the lovely Isabella, and she require time to accustom herself to the sight of me, I withdraw. She is my captive, but I am none the less her slave.”

“Your courtesy is belated,” replied Isabella, “considering the violence you have had exercised upon me.”

“That is the worst of driving people to despair by too stubborn a virtue,” returned the Duke. “When a man is driven to despair, he is likely to go to extremes, for he knows that he cannot possibly be worse off. Had you suffered me to pay court to you, and shown yourself somewhat inclined to favour me, I should have been content to rank among your adorers, and to try gradually to tame your rebellious heart by dint of delicate gallantry, loving lavishness, chivalrous devotion, and ardent, though restrained, passion. I should have inspired in you, if not love, at least the tender pity which at times precedes and induces it. In course of time, it may be, you would have seen that your coldness towards me was unjust, for I should have stopped at nothing to prove that to you.”

“Had you indeed made use of such honourable means,” said Isabella, “I should have pitied your love, though I could never return it — since I mean never



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to bestow it — and I should at least not have been driven to abhor you, a feeling foreign to my nature and which it pains me to experience.”

“ You hate me greatly, then ? ” said the Duke de Vallombreuse, in a voice that trembled. “ Yet I do not merit that you should do so. Even if I have acted wrongly towards you, it is only because I love you ; and there is no woman, however chaste and virtuous, who is really angry with a lover because of the effect her charms have upon him in spite of herself.”

“ Assuredly it is not a reason for aversion, provided the lover remains within the bounds of respect and breathes his passion with discreet timidity. The greatest prude will bear with so much ; but when, insolently impatient, he at once resorts to the worst excesses and indulges in ambushes, abductions, and imprisonment, as you have not hesitated to do, then there is room for no feeling save that of invincible repugnance. Any heart in the least proud and self-respecting, will revolt against an attempt to bend it. Love is a divine thing, which can neither be compelled nor obtained by force, and it blows whithersoever it listeth.”

“ So all I am to expect from you is invincible repugnance ? ” said Vallombreuse, whose cheeks had



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blanched and who had bitten his lips more than once while Isabella was speaking with the gentle firmness characteristic of the girl, who was as prudent as she was charming.

“ There is one way in which you can regain my esteem and compel my friendship,” she returned. “ Restore to me the liberty of which you have deprived me. Have me taken back to my comrades, who are anxiously wondering what has become of me, and who are looking for me distractedly. Let me return to my humble life of an actress before this adventure is known, which will ruin my reputation if, in consequence of the public wondering what has become of me, it is bruited abroad.”

“ It is a great pity,” answered the Duke, “ that you should ask for the one thing I cannot grant you without doing myself a wrong. Did you but desire a throne, an empire, I should bestow it upon you; a star, I should climb the heavens to fetch it for you. But you want me to open the door of this cage, to which you would never again return once you had escaped from it. It is out of the question. I am well aware that you have so little love for me that my only chance of seeing you is to keep you imprisoned. And though this course wounds my pride, yet am I com-



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elled to resort to it, for I can no more do without you than a plant can live without light. My thoughts turn towards you as towards the sun, and where you are not is deepest night for me. If it be criminal to do what I have ventured to do, at least I am bound to turn it to advantage, for, talk as you will, you will never forgive me. Here, at least, I have you, I am around you, I envelop your hatred of me with my love, I breathe upon the icicles of your repugnance with the hot breath of my passion. Your eyes cannot avoid reflecting my face; your ears must perforce hear my voice. In spite of yourself, a portion of my being penetrates within your heart; I have influence over you, even though only through the terror I cause you, and the sound of my step in the antechamber makes you start. Then, too, this captivity separates you from the man you love, and whom I hate because he has taken a heart that should have been mine. My jealousy is satisfied to be content with so mean a pittance of happiness, and I will not risk the loss of it by restoring to you a liberty you would at once use against me."

“And how long do you intend to keep me thus closely confined, not as a Christian gentleman would do, but a Barbary corsair?”



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“Until you love me, or say you love me, which is one and the same thing,” returned the young Duke, quite seriously and apparently meaning just what he said.

He then bowed very gracefully to Isabella, and went out in the most self-possessed way, like a thorough-bred courtier whom no circumstances can ever embarrass.

Half an hour later a lackey brought a bouquet, composed of the rarest flowers, that mingled their colours and their perfumes. For the matter of that, all flowers were rare at that time of year, and it had taken all the skill of the gardeners and the artificial summer of the hot-houses to induce these daughters of Flora to bloom prematurely. The bouquet was fastened with a magnificent bracelet, fit for a queen, and among the flowers there was a white paper, folded, that attracted the glance. Isabella took it, for, in the situation in which she found herself, the small change of gallantry had lost all meaning.

She recognised the hand which had written “For Isabella” upon the jewel casket in Poictiers; for the paper was a note from Vallombreuse, written in the following words, the handwriting being bold, as be-fitted the gentleman himself:—



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“ DEAREST ISABELLA,— I send you these flowers, though I feel sure they will not prove welcome. Coming from me, your unparalleled coldness will think them lacking both in beauty and in scent. But no matter what may be the fate that awaits them, even if all you do with them is to throw them out of the window by way of marking the intensity of your contempt for me, they will yet compel your angry thoughts to dwell upon me for an instant, were it only to curse him who, in spite of all, subscribes himself

“ Your persistent lover,

“ VALLOMBREUSE.”

The note, euphuistic in its gallantry, and revealing in the writer a terrible steadfastness of purpose, that would not yield to any consideration, produced in part the effect the Duke had hoped for. Isabella held the paper in her hand, and her face was clouded, as Vallombreuse appeared to her in diabolical shape. The scent of the flowers, most of them foreign, and placed by the lackey upon the small table near her, became stronger in the heat of the room, and the exotic perfumes they gave out waxed more oppressive and heavier. Isabella took the flowers, and, without removing the



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diamond bracelet with which the bouquet was fastened, threw them into the antechamber, fearing they might have been impregnated with some subtle narcotic or love philter, intended to act upon her senses. Never were beautiful flowers so badly treated, yet Isabella was very fond of them; only, she dreaded increasing the Duke's belief in his powers if she kept them. Then, also, the curious shapes, the strange hues, and the unknown scent of these exotics lacked the modest charm of ordinary flowers, and their proud beauty recalled too much that of Vallombreuse.

Scarcely had she deposited the proscribed bouquet upon a table in the next room and regained her arm-chair when a maid entered to assist her to dress. The girl was rather pretty, but very pale and sad and gentle-looking. Her actions were marked by an inertness indicative, apparently, of a feeling of secret terror or of subjection to a dread ascendancy. She offered her services to Isabella almost without looking at her, and in a soundless voice, as though she feared the walls would hear her. In obedience to the affirmative sign made by Isabella, she combed her golden hair, which was very much disordered as a consequence of the scenes of violence of the previous day and the nervous



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terrors she had suffered from during the night. The girl tied the silken curls with knots of velvet, and performed her task like a maid skilled in hair-dressing. Then she drew from a cupboard in the wall a number of dresses, wonderfully rich and elegant, which seemed to have been made purposely for Isabella. But the young actress, though her own gown was sadly rumpled and crushed, would have none of them, feeling that if she put one on she would seem to be wearing the Duke's livery, and she was irrevocably determined to accept nothing whatever from him, even at the cost of her imprisonment being lengthened even more than she anticipated.

The maid did not urge her, and respected her fancy, much as the whims of people condemned to death are gratified within the bounds of the prison. She looked as if she were trying to have as little to do with her temporary mistress as she could, lest she should become interested in her whom she could not help. She endeavoured as far as possible, to be a mere automaton, and Isabella, who had hoped to draw some information from her, saw that it was useless to question her, and yielded herself to her charge, not without a secret feeling of terror.



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When the maid had withdrawn, the dinner was brought in, and Isabella, notwithstanding the painful situation she found herself in, did honour to it. Nature imperiously asserts her rights even over the most sensitive persons.

The meal restored Isabella's strength; a thing she stood much in need of, for the various emotions and combats she had had to pass through had tried her very high. Somewhat reassured, the prisoner took to thinking of Sigognac's courage, and the valiant way in which he had behaved; she felt, that though single-handed, he would have rescued her from the ravishers had he not lost some time in getting rid of the cloak with which the treacherous blind man had covered him. By this time he must have received word of her, and she never doubted that he was speeding on his way to defend her whom he loved more than his own life. As she thought of the danger to which he would be exposed in this perilous enterprise — for the Duke was not the man to let his prey escape him without resistance — Isabella's bosom swelled and tears filled her eyes. She was angry with herself for being the cause of these rivalries, and almost cursed her beauty as the source of the whole trouble. Yet she was modest, and had not,



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through coquetry, tried, like most actresses and even many great ladies, to inflame passions around her.

She was still sunk in reverie when a sharp tap at the window startled her; one of the panes cracked, as though a hail-stone had struck it. Isabella drew near the sash, and saw in the tree opposite Chiquita, making signs to her to open the window, while she herself was swinging the hair-rope with the iron hook at the end of it. The imprisoned actress at once understood the child's wish, did what was expected of her, and the hook, thrown by a practised hand, caught on the rail of the balcony. Chiquita fastened the other end to the branch and trusted herself to it as she had done the night before; but she had not got half-way across, when, to Isabella's terror, the knot slipped and the rope came away from the tree. Instead, as was to be feared, of falling into the moat, Chiquita, who was in no respect disturbed by the accident — assuming that it was one — swung against the wall of the castle, below the window, which she soon reached by pressing with her hands and feet against the wall. Then she stepped over the balcony and sprang lightly into the room. Seeing Isabella pale and almost fainting, she smiled and said: —



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“ You were frightened, and thought that Chiquita was going to keep company with the frogs in the moat. But I had made a slip-knot only, so as to be able to haul the rope over. I suppose that when I was hanging at the end of the black rope, I must have looked like a spider climbing up her own thread, for I am dark and thin enough.”

“ You darling,” said Isabella, kissing Chiquita on the forehead, “ you are a brave and courageous girl.”

“ I have seen your friends, and I can tell you they had searched for you high and low. But for Chiquita, however, they would never have discovered where you were hidden. The Captain was raging like a lion ; his forehead smoked and his eyes flashed. He put me on the pommel of his saddle, and he is now concealed with his comrades in a small wood not far from the castle. To-night, as soon as it is dark, they will make an attempt to set you free. There will be shots and sword-cuts, and a lovely time, for there is nothing to compare with men fighting. But take care not to get frightened and to scream. Women’s cries upset a man’s courage. If you like, I shall stay by you to keep up your courage.”

“ Fear nothing, Chiquita ; I shall not hamper with



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ridiculous fears the brave friends who are exposing their lives to save me.”

“ That’s right,” answered the girl. “ Until to-night defend yourself with the knife I gave you, and don’t forget to strike from below upwards. As for me, as it is well that we should not be seen together, I shall find a corner in which I can go to sleep. Above all things do not look out of the window, for that would excite suspicion, and might suggest that you are expecting help from outside. In that case the grounds around the château would be searched, your friends be discovered, their attempt fail, and you would be left in the power of Vallombreuse, whom you detest.”

“ I promise you that, however great my curiosity, I shall not go near the window,” said Isabella.

Reassured on this important point Chiquita disappeared, and returned into the lower room, where she joined the ruffians, who, stupefied with drink and sunk in bestial sleep, had not even noticed her absence. She leaned against the wall, crossed her hands on her bosom, in her favourite attitude, closed her eyes, and speedily dropped off to sleep; for in going to and from Vallombreuse and Paris her deer-like feet had travelled more than twenty-four miles during the past night. The



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ride back, being a mode of travel to which she was not accustomed, had probably tired her still more. Though her frail body was really as tough as steel, she was fairly worn out, and she slept so soundly that she might have passed for dead.

“Wonderful how soundly children can sleep,” said Malartic, who had at last awakened. “In spite of our bacchanalian revels, she has never once opened her eyes. Here, you fellows! you lovely brutes! Try to get up on your hind legs, and trot into the yard, where you can souse your heads in cold water. The Circe of drunkenness has turned you into swine; let that baptism make men of you again, and then we shall make a round of the place to see whether anything is being attempted in favour of the beauty whom his lordship of Vallombreuse has intrusted to our safe-keeping and whom we are charged to defend.”

The desperadoes raised themselves with difficulty and staggered out of the door, in obedience to their chief’s wise orders. When they were fairly sobered, Malartic took Tordgueule, Piedgris, and La Râpée with him, proceeded to the postern, undid the padlock that shackled the chain painter of the boat made fast to the kitchen water-gate, and soon the craft, propelled by a



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pole and tearing away the mantle of glaucous aquatic lentils, reached a narrow set of steps in the side of the moat wall.

“ You, La Râpée,” said Malartic, when his men had climbed up the slope, “ shall remain here to keep an eye on the boat, in case the enemy should attempt to seize it and get into the house that way. You strike me as not being very steady on your pins yet. The rest of us shall patrol round and beat the bushes a bit, to start the birds, if any there be.”

Followed by his two acolytes, Malartic patrolled round the castle for more than an hour, but saw nothing suspicious. On returning to the starting-point, he found La Râpée sound asleep, leaning up against a tree.

“ If we were regulars,” he said to him, waking him up with a smashing blow of his fist, “ I should have you shot for falling asleep while on duty, which is a thing absolutely contrary to sound military discipline. As I cannot have you shot, I forgive you, and merely condemn you to swallow a pint of water.”

“ I’d rather have a couple of bullets in my brain than a pint of water in my stomach,” replied the drunkard.



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“That is a noble reply,” returned Malartic, “and worthy of one of Plutarch’s heroes. You are forgiven freely, but do not sin again.”

The patrol re-entered the castle, and the boat was carefully made fast and padlocked with precautions worthy of a regular fortress. Satisfied with his inspection, Malartic said to himself:—

“If the lovely Isabella gets out of this, or if Captain Fracasse gets in — for both possibilities must be taken into account, — I am willing to have my nose turn white or my face red.”

When she found herself alone, Isabella opened a volume of Honoré d’Urfé’s “Astrea,” which she found lying on a table. She tried to fix her thoughts on her reading, but her eyes alone followed the lines mechanically ; her mind was far away, and was quite uninterested in the pastorals, which, besides, were already becoming old-fashioned. Tired at last, she threw away the book and crossed her arms to await events. She had made so many conjectures that she had grown weary of the process, and without attempting to divine in what manner Sigognac would effect her deliverance, she simply trusted to the brave fellow’s thorough devotion.



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Evening had come; the lackeys lighted the tapers, and soon the majordomo appeared and announced the visit of the Duke de Vallombreuse. The latter entered immediately and bowed with perfect courtesy to his captive. He was really a man of surpassing beauty and elegance, and his handsome face must have inspired love in any unprejudiced heart. His gallant form was admirably set off by a pearl-gray satin doublet, crimson trunks, wide-topped white leather boots, the tops filled with a mass of lace, and a silver brocade scarf supporting his sword, the hilt of which was studded with gems. It needed virtue and constancy such as Isabella's not to be moved by his appearance.

“I have come to see, adorable Isabella,” he said, sitting down in an arm-chair close by her, “whether I shall meet with a more favourable reception than has been accorded to the bouquet I sent you. I am not conceited enough to suppose that such will be the case, but I mean to accustom you to see me, so to-morrow you shall receive another bouquet and another visit.”

“Both will be fruitless,” returned Isabella. “I regret having to be rude enough to say so, but my sincerity can leave you no hope.”



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“Very good,” said the Duke, with a gesture of haughty indifference. “I shall do without the hope and be satisfied with the reality. You are apparently not aware, my dear girl, who Vallombreuse is, when you try to resist him. I have *never*, never allowed one of my desires to pass unsatisfied; I go straight to my end, and I am not to be moved or turned from my purpose, either by tears, supplications, cries, or dead bodies in my way, or smoking ruins. Were the world to fall to atoms, it would not disturb me, and I should satisfy my whim on the débris of the earth. So do not increase my passion by the attraction of the impossible, you imprudent girl who let the tiger smell the lamb and then snatch it away.”

The change in the expression of Vallombreuse as he spoke terrified Isabella. The gracious look had disappeared, and his features revealed only cold wickedness and implacable resolution. Instinctively Isabella pushed back her chair, and felt in her bodice for Chiquita’s knife. Vallombreuse quietly drew his chair nearer hers. He had mastered his anger and had regained the pleasant, playful, and tender look that he had hitherto found irresistible.

“Pray school yourself, and do not return to a life



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which hereafter must be to you like a forgotten dream. Give up your obstinacy of chimerical fidelity to a languorous love unworthy of you, and remember that in the eyes of the world you belong to me now. Above all, remember that I adore you with a fury, with a madness of passion such as I have never felt for any woman. Do not attempt to escape from the flame that surrounds you, from the inflexible will that will not be swayed from its intent. Your indifference cast into my passion shall melt in it as melts the cold metal cast into the crucible where already boils molten ore. Do what you may, love me you shall, whether you will or no, because I will it, because you are young and beautiful, and I too am young and handsome. In vain shall you struggle and draw back; you will not unclasp the arms that are cast about you. So any resistance on your part would be unseemly, since it is useless. Resign yourself to your fate with a smile; for after all it is no great misfortune to be madly loved by the Duke de Vallombreuse. Such a calamity would be hailed as a piece of good fortune by most women."

While he was thus speaking, with a warmth that is apt to overcome the sounder sense of a woman and to make her forget her virtue, though on this occasion it



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utterly failed of its purpose, Isabella, keenly attentive to the least sound coming from the outside of the château, the direction whence she looked for deliverance, fancied she could make out an almost imperceptible noise on the other side of the moat. It sounded low and rhythmical, as if men were working systematically and cautiously to remove an obstacle. Dreading that it should be heard by Vallombreuse, the young woman replied to him in a manner calculated to offend his intense self-conceit, for she preferred to see him angry than tender, and violent rather than amorous. Also she hoped, by arousing his quarrelsome mood, to prevent his noticing what was going on outside.

“I should avoid such felicity by committing suicide, if no other means were left me,” she answered; “and you shall never have me save dead. You were indifferent to me; now I hate you for your outrageous, infamous, and violent conduct. Yes, I do love Sigo-gnac, whom you have time and again sought to have murdered.”

The faint noise was still audible, and Isabella, throwing away all fear, raised her voice in order to drown it.

On hearing her audacious declaration, Vallombreuse



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turned white with rage ; his eyes glittered like those of a snake ; a slight foam rose to his lips, and he unconsciously laid his hand on the hilt of his sword. It flashed through his mind to kill Isabella, but by a powerful effort of his will, he recovered himself, laughed stridently, and approached the young actress.

“ By all the devils in hell ! ” he cried, “ I like you when you talk like that. When you insult me your eyes shine, your face flushes, and your beauty is increased amazingly. You are right to speak frankly, for I was tired of constraint. You love Sigognac, do you ? I am delighted to hear it, for it will be all the pleasanter to possess you knowing that. It will be heavenly to kiss the lips that say to me, ‘ I abhor you ! ’ It will be more piquant than the eternal and stale ‘ I love you ! ’ which I am sick of ! ”

Terrified by the declaration, Isabella had risen and drawn Chiquita’s knife from her bodice.

“ Ha ! very good,” said the Duke, as he observed that the girl was armed. “ You have your dagger out, I see. If you had not forgotten Roman history, my beauty, you would remember that it was not until after she had been assaulted by Sextus, son of Tarquinius Superbus, that Mistress Lucrece made use of her



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dagger. I commend this example, drawn from antiquity, to you."

And minding the knife as little as he would have minded a needle, he closed upon Isabella, and clasped her in his arms ere she had time to raise her hand.

At this very moment a cracking sound was heard, immediately followed by a tremendous smash; the sash, as if smitten from outside by a giant, fell with a rattle of broken glass into the room, giving passage to a mass of branches that formed a sort of bristling catapult and flying-bridge.

It was the top of the tree by which Chiquita had escaped and returned. The trunk, sawn asunder by Sigognac and his companions, had yielded to the law of gravity, while it had been so guided in its fall as to connect the farther bank of the moat and Isabella's window.

Vallombreuse, startled by the sudden irruption of the tree that thus took part in a love scene, released Isabella and drew his sword, ready to receive the first man who should attack him.

Chiquita, who had entered on tiptoe, light as a shadow, plucked Isabella by the sleeve, and whispered to her:—



VALLOMBREUSE

“Get behind the furniture; the fun is going to begin.”

She was right: just then two or three shots were heard in the silence of night. It was the garrison, that had discovered it was being attacked.

CAPTAIN FRACASSE

XVII

THE AMETHYST RING

MALARTIC, Bringuenarilles, Tordgueule, and Piedgris climbed the stairs four at a time and rushed into Isabella's room to repel the assault and aid Vallombreuse, while La Râpée, Mérindol, and the Duke's ruffians in ordinary, whom he had brought with him, pulled across the moat in the boat in order to make a sortie and take the enemy in flank; a clever piece of strategy worthy of a skilful general.

As the top of the tree obstructed the window, rather a narrow one, and as the branches spread out to the centre of the room, it was impossible to present any extended front to the foe. Malartic therefore placed himself on one side by the wall, with Piedgris, and sent Tordgueule and Bringuenarilles on the other, so that they should not have to bear the first brunt of the attack and should be more advantageously placed. Before the rescuers could enter the place, therefore,



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they would be compelled to break through the line of desperate ruffians awaiting them sword in one hand and pistol in the other. They had all put on their masks again, for not one of the gang cared to be recognised in the event of fortune proving adverse ; and the sight of these four black-visaged men, motionless and silent as spectres, was distinctly terrifying.

“ Withdraw or put on your mask,” said Malartic to Vallombreuse in a whisper. “ No good can come of your being recognised in this business.”

“ What care I for that ? ” replied the young Duke. “ I fear no one ; and those who may set eyes on me will have no chance of reporting the fact,” he added, handling his sword in menacing fashion.

“ At least take Isabella, Helen of another Troy, into the next room. A chance shot might spoil her beauty, which would be a pity.”

The Duke, considering the advice sound, approached Isabella, who was hiding behind a coffer with Chiquita, and took her in his arms in spite of her efforts to resist Vallombreuse and to cling to the projections of the carving. The virtuous girl, overcoming the timidity of her sex, preferred to remain on the field of battle, exposed to bullets and sword-thrusts, that could have



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deprived her of life only, to being alone with Vallombreuse, safe from the fighting but exposed to outrages against her honour.

“Let me go! let me go!” she cried, struggling and clinging with desperate efforts to the jamb of the door, for she felt that Sigognac could not be far off. At last the Duke managed to open one of the leaves of the door, and was about to drag the girl into the next room, when Isabella got away from him and ran to the window. Vallombreuse, however, compelled her to let go her hold, lifted her up, and bore her to the end of the room.

“Help!” she cried in a faint voice, feeling her strength leaving her. “Help! Sigognac!”

There was a sound of breaking branches, and a deep voice, that appeared to come from heaven, shouted into the room the words, “Here I am!” Swift as lightning a dark form broke through the four ruffians, with such speed that it had already reached the centre of the room when four pistol-shots rang out simultaneously. A cloud of smoke, spreading in dense convolutions, concealed for a moment the result of the volley. When it was somewhat dispelled, the ruffians saw Sigognac, or Captain Fracasse, rather, since that was



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the only name they knew him by, standing sword in hand and unharmed, save for the loss of a part of the feather in his hat, the wheel-locks of the pistols having worked too slowly to allow the men to hit him in his quick dash. But Isabella and the Duke were gone, the latter having profited by the tumult to carry off his half-fainting prey. A heavy door and a strong bolt were interposed between the poor actress and her brave defender, who was already sufficiently handicapped by the lot of rascals he had to contend with. Fortunately, Chiquita, quick and slim as an eel, had, in hopes of being of use to Isabella, slipped in behind the Duke, who, in the confusion and the noise of the pistol-shots, did not observe her, especially as she quickly concealed herself in a dark corner of the large hall, ill lighted by a lamp placed upon a side-table.

“Scoundrels, where is Isabella ?” cried Sigognac when he saw that the young actress was gone. “I heard her voice but now.”

“ You did not ask us to look after her,” answered Malartic, “ and besides we are but poor duennas.”

As he spoke he dashed at the Baron sword in hand, and was received in right good fashion by the latter. Malartic was not an adversary to be trifled with; he



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had the reputation of being the most skilful swordsman in Paris, next to Lampourde ; but he was not fit to cope long with Sigognac.

“ Watch the window while I polish off this fellow,” said he, while thrusting and parrying, to Piedgris, Tordgueule, and Bringuenarilles, who were busy reloading their pistols as fast as they could.

Just then a new opponent burst into the room turning a summersault. It was Scappino, whose former experience as an acrobat and soldier made him singularly successful in that sort of storming. Casting a rapid glance around him, he saw that the ruffians had their hands full putting powder and bullets in their weapons, and that they had laid their swords down by their side. Quick as lightning he profited by the momentary surprise of the enemy, startled at his peculiar way of entering, seized the rapiers, and threw them out of the window. Then he dashed at Bringuenarilles, caught him round the waist, and made a shield of him, pushing him ahead of himself and turning him about so as to interpose the fellow’s body between himself and the muzzles of the pistols.

“ Damn it, you fellows, don’t shoot ! ” howled Bringuenarilles, half choked by Scappino’s muscular



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grasp. "You will hit me in the back or in the head, and I should particularly dislike being killed by my comrades."

In order to prevent Tordgueule and Piedgris firing at him from behind, Scappino had prudently backed up against the wall, keeping Bringuenarilles in front of him; and with the view of disturbing their aim, he kept jerking the ruffian from side to side, so that the fellow, though his feet at times touched the ground, did not, like *Antæus*, regain strength by the performance.

It was a clever move, for Piedgris, who had no particular affection for Bringuenarilles, and who esteemed a man's life no more than a straw, even if the man were his comrade, aimed at Scappino's head, the latter being somewhat taller than the bravo. The pistol was discharged, but the player had bent down at the same time that he held up Bringuenarilles as a protection, and the bullet drove into the pannelling, cutting off the poor devil's ear on its way; whereupon the wounded man yelled out, "I am dead! I am dead!" in a way that proved conclusively that he was very much alive.

Scappino was not disposed to await a second shot, for he knew well that the bullet could reach him



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through Bringuenarilles' body, the friends of the latter being quite unscrupulous enough to sacrifice him, and that thus he might be dangerously wounded; he therefore made use of the wounded man as a projectile, and hurled him so hard against Tordgueule, who was approaching and aiming at him, that the pistol was dashed from his hand and the ruffian went down pell mell with his comrade, whose blood spurted in his face. He fell so heavily that he remained for a moment stunned and bruised, giving Scappino time to kick the pistol under a piece of furniture and to draw his sword to defend himself against Piedgris, who, dagger in hand, was charging him, incensed at having missed him.

Scappino bent down, and with his left hand seized Piedgris' right arm, and forcibly held it up, while with the sword in his other hand he struck a blow that would undoubtedly have finished his opponent but for the thickness of the latter's buff jerkin. The blade did go through the leather, and pierced the flesh, but was turned aside by one of the ribs. Although the wound was neither mortal nor even serious, it took Piedgris aback and caused him to stagger, so that the actor, pressing suddenly upon the man's arm, for he



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had not let it go, easily overthrew his opponent, who was already down upon one knee. By way of making sure of him, he hammered him over the head with his heel.

Meanwhile Sigognac was fighting Malartic with the cool fury of a man whose tried courage is served by superior skill. He parried the ruffian's every thrust and had already wounded him in the arm, as was shown by the sudden reddening of the rascal's sleeve. The latter, realising that if the fight went on he was a dead man, resolved to make a desperate attempt, and lunged out to his fullest extent to thrust straight at Sigognac. The blades rubbed against each other so sharp and hard that fire flashed from them, but the Baron's, held by an iron hand, turned off the bravo's warped sword ; the point passed under Captain Fracasse's arm, scratching the stuff of his doublet, though without cutting it. Malartic recovered himself, but before he could get on guard Sigognac sent his rapier flying out of his hand, put his foot upon it, and placing the point of his own sword upon the fellow's throat, said :—

“ Surrender or you are a dead man ! ”

At this critical moment the smaller branches of the tree were smashed by the irruption of a tall fellow who



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plumped into the fight ; perceiving Malartic's parlous state, the new-comer said to him authoritatively : —

“ You may surrender without dishonour to that champion ; he holds you at his mercy. You have done your duty faithfully. Consider yourself a prisoner of war.”

Then, turning to Sigognac : —

“ You may trust to his word ; in his own way he is a man of honour, and will never attempt anything against you hereafter.”

Malartic nodded assent, and the Baron lowered the point of his formidable sword. The ruffian picked up his weapon rather shamefacedly, sheathed it and sat down silently in an arm-chair, busying himself tying up his arm, on which the red spot was growing larger, with his pocket-handkerchief.

“ As for these rascals who are more or less dead,” said Jacquemin Lampourde, — for it was he, — “ it will be as well to secure them ; and therefore we shall, if you please, tie them up like fowls carried to market head down. They might turn over and bite, even if it were only at our heels. They are thorough-paced scoundrels, quite capable of malingering for the sake of saving their skins, little as these are worth.”



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Then bending over the prostrate bodies, he drew from his trunks ends of fine cord with which he made fast, with singular skill, the hands of Tordgueule, who showed fight, of Bringuenarilles, who yelled like one possessed, and likewise of Piedgris, although the latter was as still and as white as a dead body.

The fact that Lampourde was taking part with the besiegers is not to be wondered at, for he had conceived the liveliest admiration for Sigognac, whose admirable method in fencing had so charmed him when he had attacked the Baron on the Pont-Neuf, and he had then put himself at his disposal. Now his services were not to be disdained in circumstances as difficult and dangerous as the attack on the castle. Besides, it very often happened that comrades met sword or dagger in hand in the course of perilous enterprises of this sort, and that they did not mind in the least.

It will be remembered that La Râpée, Agostino, Mérindol, Azolan, and Labriche, who had crossed the moat in the boat at the outset of the attack, had left the château with the object of making a diversion and taking the besiegers in rear. They had silently marched round the moat, and had reached the place where the



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huge tree, detached from its base, had fallen across and served both as a flying-bridge and a scaling-ladder to the champions of the young actress.

The worthy Herod had of course offered his assistance to Sigognac, whom he esteemed highly, and whom he would have followed into the very mouth of hell, even if it had not been a case of rescuing the well beloved Isabella, who had endeared herself to the whole company, and whom he was particularly fond of. It was not due to cowardice that he had not yet figured in the thick of the fight, for, actor as he was, he was as brave as a soldier. He had bestridden the tree, like the others, lifting himself along with his hands, and progressing in jerks, at the expense of the seat of his trunks, which was suffering from the roughness of the bark. Ahead of him moved, as quickly as he could, the doorkeeper of the company, a resolute fellow accustomed to use his fists, and to resist the onset of the crowd. When the doorkeeper reached the point where the branches forked, he laid hold of a strong one and continued on his upward way, but when Herod, who was stout as Goliath, reached the top of the trunk, his weight, well suited to one who played the parts of tyrants, but not so well adapted for a stormer, caused



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the bough to bend and crack under him in a most alarming manner. He looked down, and some thirty feet below, in the darkness, he caught sight of the sombre waters of the moat. This caused him to pause and to secure a position upon one of the more solid parts of the tree, capable of bearing his weight.

“ By Jupiter ! ” said he to himself, “ an elephant might just as well try to balance itself upon a spider’s thread as I to trust myself to these twigs that would bend under a sparrow. That sort of thing is all very well for Scappinos, lovers, and other nimble people whose business requires that they should be thin. But as a tragedy-king and tyrant, fonder of wine than of women, I am not up to such acrobatic performances. If I endeavour to proceed farther in support of the Captain, who no doubt requires assistance, if I may judge by the firing of pistols and the clashing of swords, which indicate that matters are pretty warm up there, I shall assuredly take a header in that Stygian water, as thick and black as ink, green with viscous plants, swarming with toads and frogs, and I shall sink into the mud over head and ears, meeting with a most inglorious death, gaining a fetid tomb, and ending most wretchedly and profitlessly, for I



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shall have accounted for not a single one of the enemy. There is no shame in drawing back; courage can do no good here. Even were I Achilles, Roland, or the Cid, I should none the less weigh two hundred and forty pounds and some odd ounces, and be sticking on a branch no thicker than my little finger. It is a question of statics, not of heroism. Therefore, right about face! I shall surely find some surreptitious mode of entering the fortress and aiding the worthy Baron, who just at this moment must be suspecting that my friendship is not worth much,—that is, supposing he has time to think of that or anything else."

This monologue ended, spoken as it was with the inner voice, so much faster than the physical, which worthy Homer nevertheless calls "winged," Herod turned abruptly right round on his wooden horse, that is, on the bole of the tree, and began to descend with great prudence. Suddenly he stopped. A faint sound of knees rubbing against the bark and of the hard breathing of a man struggling to climb, struck on his ear, and although the night was dark, and rendered still more so by the shadow of the castle, he fancied he could make out a dim form that stood out against the vertical line of the trunk. In order not to be seen,



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he bent over and flattened himself out as much as his corporation would allow him to do. In that attitude he awaited the coming of the man, taking care to hold in his breath. In a couple of minutes he looked up, and seeing his foe close to him, drew himself up unexpectedly and showed his big face to the rascal, who had hoped to attack him in rear.

In order to have his hands free while climbing, Mérindol, who led the attack, had his knife between his teeth, so that in the darkness he looked as if he had a huge pair of mustaches. Herod seized him round the neck with his mighty hand, and squeezed his throat so hard that Mérindol, choking as if his head had been passed through the hangman's noose, opened his mouth to draw breath and let fall his knife, which plumped into the moat. But the pressure on his throat not diminishing, his knees gave way, his limp arms moved convulsively, and soon the sound of a heavy fall in the water made itself heard in the darkness, while the spray splashed up to Herod's feet.

“That's one accounted for,” said the Tyrant to himself. “If he be not choked to death, he is certainly drowned, and either result is gratifying. Now let me proceed on my perilous descent.”



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He made his way down a little farther. A small bluish spark was twinkling within a short distance of him, revealing the match of a pistol. The wheel-lock clicked sharply, a light flashed in the darkness, a shot was heard, and a bullet passed two or three inches above Herod's head; but the latter had crouched low the moment he had caught sight of the shining point, and had pulled his head well down between his ears like a turtle, and well it was for him that he did so.

“Confound the fellow,” grumbled a voice, which was that of La Râpée; “I have missed him!”

“You have indeed, my lad,” returned Herod, “and yet I am big enough. You must be a desperately poor shot; however, try to parry this.”

Whereupon the Tyrant raised a cudgel fastened to his wrist with a leather thong; not a very aristocratic weapon, no doubt, but which he handled with remarkable dexterity, having for a long time, while on his rounds through the provinces, practised with the Rouen quarter-staff players. The cudgel struck the sword which the ruffian had drawn, after returning the useless pistol to his belt, and smashed it to flinders, so that La Râpée found himself with the stump of it merely in his hand. He was even hit on the shoulder



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by the cudgel, and though the force of the blow was deadened, he received a slight contusion.

The two adversaries being now face to face — for the one insisted on trying to get down, and the other on getting up, — they clasped each other round the body and strove each to precipitate the other into the black, gaping abyss of the moat below. La Râpée was a very strong and skilful rascal, but he found it no easy matter to move the Tyrant's huge bulk; he might as well have tried to uproot a tower. Herod had wound his legs around the trunk of the tree, and held on as if he had grappling-irons out. La Râpée, squeezed by a pair of arms as muscular as those of Hercules, was perspiring and choking. Almost flattened out against the Tyrant's broad chest, he pressed out with his hands against the latter's shoulders, in order to free himself of his powerful grasp. By a clever feint, Herod relaxed his hold slightly, and the ruffian pulled himself up, drawing in at the same time a deep breath. Herod then, letting him go suddenly, caught him once more lower down, just on the hips, and lifting him up in the air, compelled him to leave his point of support. All the Tyrant now had to do to send La Râpée plunging through the lentil plants



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on the moat, was to open his hands. He did so, and the ruffian fell. But being, as I have said, a quick and light fellow, he managed to clutch a bough, and hung on to the tree, his body swinging over the water, while he made desperate efforts to catch on to the trunk with his feet and his legs. He failed to do so, and hung pulled out like a capital "I," his arm horribly strained by the weight of his body. Determined not to let go, he drove his fingers into the bark, which they tore as if they had been steel talons, while the muscles stretched out on his hand, apparently near snapping, like the strings on a violin when they are strung up too taut. Had it been light, the blood would have been seen spurting from under his finger nails.

It was not a pleasant position. Hanging by a single hand, dreadfully strained by the weight of his whole body, La Râpée experienced, in addition to physical pain, the dread horror of falling, mingled with the strange attraction caused by his being suspended over a black gulf. His wide-open eyes stared at the sombre depth; his ears buzzed; his temples were lancinated as by arrows; he wanted to let himself drop, but forthwith the lively instinct of self-preservation held him



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back. He could not swim, and therefore the moat meant death for him.

In spite of his grim look and coal-black eyebrows, Herod was at bottom a tender-hearted creature. He felt pity for the poor devil who had been swinging in empty air for some minutes, that to the wretch must have seemed as long as eternity, and whose agony was prolonged by atrocious suffering. Bending over the trunk, he said to La Râpée: —

“ You rascal, if you swear by your life in the next world — for your life in this is in my hands — to remain neutral in the fight, I shall take you off the gibbet on which you are hanging like the wicked thief.”

“ I swear it,” gasped La Râpée in a low voice, for his strength was done. “ But for God’s sake, be quick, for I cannot hold on.”

Herod caught the rascal’s arm with his mighty hand, and thanks to his amazing strength, pulled the fellow up on the tree, where he set him astride the trunk opposite him, handling him as easily as if he had been a rag doll.

La Râpée was no school miss subject to fainting, yet he was almost gone when the worthy actor drew



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him into safety, and but for the strong grasp that held him, he would have tumbled off like an inert mass.

“I have not any salts to make you breathe, or any feathers to burn under your nose,” said the Tyrant, as he rummaged in his pockets; “but here is a cordial that will set you up, for it is genuine Hendayes brandy, the very spirit of the sun.”

Whereupon he applied the mouth of the bottle to the lips of the swooning ruffian.

“Come, drink down this milk. Two or three sips more, and you will be as lively as an unhooded hawk.”

The strong drink quickly acted on the bravo, who thanked Herod with a gesture of the hand, and moved his numb arm to restore the circulation.

“Now,” said Herod, “let us waste no more time, and get down from this perch, on which I am far from being at my ease, to the blessed solid earth which better suits my corpulence. You go first,” he added, turning La Râpée right round and setting him astride the tree.

La Râpée slid down the trunk and the Tyrant followed him. On reaching the bottom of the tree, the ruffian, still followed by Herod, perceived a group on watch at the edge of the moat. It was composed



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of Agostino, Azolan, and Basque. "A friend!" he cried aloud, and turning round he whispered to the player: —

"Say not a word, and follow close at my heels."

As they landed on the ground La Râpée approached Azolan and gave the countersign, adding. —

"This man and I are wounded and are going to the rear for a moment to wash and dress our hurts."

Azolan nodded in assent, for the tale was a likely one, and La Râpée and the Tyrant therefore went quietly off. When they were fairly within the shelter of the wood, which, although the trees were leafless, was thick enough to conceal them, the darkness aiding, the ruffian said to Herod: —

"You generously granted me my life; in return I have just saved you from death, for those fellows would have knocked you on the head. I have paid my debt, but I consider myself still under obligation to you. If you should ever need me, you will find me ready. Now go about your business; I shall strike this way; do you travel in that direction."

Herod continued down the walk on finding himself alone, looking through the trees at the accursed castle into which he had, to his great regret, failed to penetrate.



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Except on the side attacked there was not a light in any of the windows, the castle being buried in darkness and silence. But on the façade at right angle the rising moon was beginning to cast its beams, silverying the purple slates of the roof. The growing light enabled the Tyrant to see a sentry walking up and down upon a narrow esplanade on the bank of the moat. It was Labriche, watching the boat in which Mérindol, La Râpée, Azolan, and Agostino had crossed the moat.

The sight of the sentry made Herod reflect.

“What the devil is that man doing alone in that solitary place while his comrades are fighting? Probably, in order to prevent a surprise or to secure their retreat, he is placed there to guard a secret passage or a concealed postern, through which, after I have stunned him with a blow of my cudgel on his pate, I may manage to get into that confounded castle and prove to Sigognac that I have not forgotten him.”

While thus ruminating, Herod, treading lightly and as noiselessly as if his shoes had been soled with felt, approached the sentry with the gentle and feline deliberation characteristic of stout men. As soon as he was within reach, he dealt him a blow on the head calculated to stun but not to kill him, for, as has been



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seen, Herod was not naturally cruel and in no wise desired the death of a sinner.

As much taken by surprise as if a lightning bolt had come out of the blue, Labriche went down like a stone and remained motionless, the force of the blow having caused him to lose his senses. Herod then advanced to the parapet of the moat, and saw that from a narrow cut in the rail there ran down a diagonal set of steps, cut in the revetment wall, and leading to the bottom of the moat or, at least, to the level of the water that lipped the lower steps. The Tyrant descended cautiously, and stopped when he felt his feet wet. He endeavoured to pierce the obscurity ; ere long he made out the boat, hauled close up to the wall, and drew it to him by means of the chain painter fastened to the foot of the steps. It was an easy matter for him to break the chain, and he stepped into the boat, which his weight nearly caused to turn turtle. As soon as it had done rocking and had regained its equilibrium, Herod gently sculled with the single oar placed in the stern, and which served both to propel and to steer the craft. The boat, yielding to the impulse given it, soon shot out of the shadow into the lighted strip, the moonlight making the oily waters sparkle like the scales



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of blay-fish. The pale beams of the moon enabled Herod to make out, in the substructure of the castle, a narrow stair under a vaulting of brick-work. He landed there, and by simply passing under the archway, reached without hindrance the inner court, which at this moment was completely deserted.

“I am right in the heart of the place,” said Herod, rubbing his hands. “I feel a good deal braver upon these broad, well cemented stones than I did upon that parrot’s perch from which I have climbed down. And now let me get my bearings, and join my comrades.”

Observing the steps guarded by the two stone sphinxes, he wisely concluded that so fine an entrance must lead to the handsomest rooms in the building, where no doubt Vallombreuse had confined the young actress, and where must be fought out the battle on behalf of this virtuous Helen, unincumbered with a Menelaus. Nor did the sphinxes presume to forbid his passing.

The victory seemed to be with the assailants. Bringuenarilles, Tordgueule and Piedgris lay like cattle on the floor; Malartic, the leader of the band, had been disarmed. In point of fact, however, the victors were prisoners, for the door of the room, bolted outside,



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stood between them and the object of their search. And the door, being constructed of thick oak adorned with elegant polished steel-work, might readily prove an insurmountable obstacle to people unprovided with axes and crowbars. Sigognac, Lampourde, and Scapino, putting their shoulders against it, were trying to burst it open, but it stood fast and resisted their united efforts.

“Let us burn it down,” said Sigognac, who was desperate. “There are blazing logs on the fire.”

“It would take a long time,” replied Lampourde, “for oak is hard to burn. Let us rather lay hold of that coffer and use it as a catapult or battering-ram to burst in this most inopportune barrier.”

No sooner was this said than it was done, and the handsome piece of furniture, wrought with delicate carvings, was roughly caught up and hurled against the solid door, with no better result than the spoiling of the polished surface and the breaking off the pretty head of an angel or a Cupid exquisitely carved upon one of the corners. The Baron was nearly crazy, for he knew that Vallombreuse had carried off the girl when he left the room, notwithstanding her desperate resistance.



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Suddenly a tremendous row was heard. The branches obstructing the window disappeared, and the tree fell into the water in the moat with sounds of smashing mingled with the cries of a man, the cries of the doorkeeper, who had stopped on his way up, finding the branch was not stout enough for his weight. The brilliant idea of tumbling the tree into the water, in order to cut off the besiegers' retreat, had occurred to Azolan, Agostino, and Basque.

“If we do not succeed in breaking in the door,” said Lampourde, “we shall be caught like rats in a trap. The devil take the workmen of old who wrought in such durable fashion. I shall try to cut the wood out round the lock with my dagger, and see if I can pick it off, since we cannot force it. We must get out of this at any cost, for we no longer have the chance of hanging on to our tree, like bears on their stump in the pits in Berne, in Switzerland.”

He was just setting about the job, when the sound of a key turning in the lock became audible, and the door attacked in vain suddenly opened of itself.

“Who is the good angel,” cried Sigognac, “who has thus come to our aid? And by what miracle does



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the door yield so readily after having so stubbornly defied us?"

"There is neither angel nor miracle," answered Chiquita, issuing from behind the door, and looking at the Baron in her quiet, mysterious way.

"Where is Isabella?" cried Sigognac, glancing round the room dimly lighted by the faint light of a small lamp.

He did not at first see her. The Duke de Vallombreuse, startled by the sudden throwing open of the leaves of the door, was standing at bay in one corner, having placed the young actress behind him. The girl was half dead with terror and fatigue; she had sunk to the ground, her head resting against the wall, her hair undone and falling around her, her garments in disorder and the lacing of her bodice broken, so desperately had she fought her ravisher, who, feeling his prey escaping him, had in vain tried to snatch a few lascivious kisses, like a faun pursued as he is carrying a nymph into the forest.

"There she is," said Chiquita, "in the corner, behind my lord Vallombreuse. But if you want the girl, you will have to kill the man."

"That is a small matter," returned Sigognac, "and kill him I shall."



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Whereupon he dashed at the young Duke sword in hand.

“We shall see about that, Master Captain Fracasse, knight-errant of gipsies,” replied the Duke with great disdain.

The blades met and turned one around the other in the slow and prudent way which skilful swordsmen adopt in a deadly combat. Vallombreuse was no match for Sigognac, but, as became a man of his rank, he had long frequented fencing-schools, practised hard, and been taught by the best masters. Therefore he did not hold his sword like a broom-handle, to recall Lampourde’s contemptuous description of unskilful fencers, who, in that worthy’s opinion, cast discredit upon the art. Knowing how much his adversary was to be dreaded, the young Duke kept on the defensive, parried the thrusts, and did not attempt to return them. He hoped to tire out Sigognac, who must be already wearied by the share he had taken in the attack on the castle and by his bout with Malartic, the sounds of which had reached him through the door. But, while keeping the Baron’s blade from his breast, he was feeling with his left hand for a small silver whistle hanging on a chain and concealed in the breast of his doublet.



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On getting hold of it he put it to his lips, and blew a shrill and prolonged call, a performance that was within an ace of costing him his life; the Baron's sword nearly pinned his hand to his lips; but though the Duke's parry was a little tardy, it served to strike up the point, and he was merely cut on the thumb. Vallombreuse kept on guard again; his eyes flashed yellow glances like those of jettatori and basilisks, glances known to be deadly; a diabolically wicked smile played on his lips; he beamed with gratified ferocity, and without affording a single opening, he was advancing upon Sigognac, thrusting and lunging, though the Baron's parry was always ready.

Malartic, Lampourde, and Scappino were watching admiringly this most interesting fight, on which hung the fortunes of the day; for it was the leaders of the two parties who were engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle. Scappino had even fetched the candles from the other room in order that the rivals should have more light. It was a touching attention.

“The little Duke is not doing badly,” said Lampourde, who was an impartial admirer of good work. “I should not have supposed that he could be so strong on the defensive; but if he lunges he is done for.



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Captain Fracasse's arm is longer than his. Did n't I tell you? There's his opponent's sword flashing into the opening! Vallombreuse is hit! No! he has fallen back in the nick of time."

At this moment the sound of clattering steps was heard approaching. A panel opened noisily and five or six armed lackeys dashed into the room.

"Carry off the girl," called Vallombreuse to them, "and charge these rascals. I shall account for the Captain."

And thereupon he charged the Baron.

Sigognac was startled by the irruption of the rabble; his guard was less close, for he was following with his eyes Isabella, unconscious, borne away towards the stairs by a couple of lackeys whose retreat the Duke was protecting. The result of his inattention was that Vallombreuse's point scored his wrist. The scratch recalled him to a sense of the situation, and he lunged straight out at the Duke, driving his sword through his body just below the collar bone, to such good purpose that the Duke staggered backwards.

In the meantime Lampourde and Scappino were handling the lackeys in rare fashion; the former was sticking them with his long rapier as though they had



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been so many rats, and Scappino hammering them over the head with the butt of a pistol he had picked up. On seeing their master wounded, leaning against the wall and supporting himself on the hilt of his sword, his face pale as death, the wretched rabble, utterly cowardly, gave up the fight and made a bolt of it. It is true that Vallombreuse had not gained the affection of his servants, whom he treated as a tyrant rather than as a master would, and towards whom he exhibited the most astounding ferocity.

“Here, you rascals! Help!” he moaned in a faint voice. “Are you going to leave me without aid or succour?”

While this was going on, Herod, as I have said, was tripping, as lightly as his weight allowed him, up the great staircase, which, since Vallombreuse had arrived, was lighted with a handsomely wrought lantern hanging from a silken cord. He reached the first-floor landing at the very moment when the lackeys were bearing away Isabella, dishevelled, pale, motionless, and apparently dead. He jumped to the conclusion that the young Duke had killed her, or caused her to be killed, out of revenge for her determined resistance, and his wrath being kindled by the thought, he fell upon the



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fellows with his sword. The men, taken aback by this unexpected attack, against which they were powerless, their hands being full at the time, dropped their victim and fled as if the devil were hotfoot after them. Herod stooped and raised Isabella, placed her head upon his knee, and laid his hand on her heart to ascertain whether she still lived. He was reassured to find that she was apparently unwounded and was beginning to breathe faintly like one who is regaining consciousness.

Sigognac, having disposed of Vallombreuse by using against him the terrific thrust Lampourde so greatly admired, shortly came upon him in this attitude. The Baron knelt by Isabella, took hold of her hands, and said to her, in a voice which she heard distantly as in a dream:—

“ Recover yourself, dear one, and fear nothing. You are with your friends, and no one now can harm you.”

Although as yet unable to open her eyes, a faint smile played upon Isabella’s lips, from which the colour had fled, and her fingers, clammy with the cold sweat of the swoon, gently pressed Sigognac’s hand. Lampourde, who claimed to be an expert in affairs of the heart, watched the group with moistened glance.



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Suddenly an imperious blast of horns was heard in the silence which had succeeded to the tumult of battle. A few minutes later it was repeated with strident and prolonged angry accent. It was the call of a master who must be obeyed. The clanking of chains was heard; a low rumble indicated that the drawbridge was being lowered; there was a rattling of wheels under the archway; the windows of the staircase blazed instantaneously with the red glow of torches in the courtyard; the great entrance-door opened noisily, and hasty steps were heard ascending the stairs.

Presently appeared four lackeys in state liveries, carrying lighted candles with the impassible air and the mute swiftness characteristic of the retainers of a great establishment. Behind them came a gentleman of proud mien, dressed from head to foot in black velvet quilled with jet. The star of an order of knighthood to which kings and princes and a few personages of the most illustrious alone belong, glittered upon his breast. On reaching the landing the lackeys drew up against the wall, like statues bearing candelabra in their hands, without the slightest motion of the muscles of their faces indicating that they were in the least conscious of the startling scene being enacted before them.



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Their master not having yet spoken, it was not their business to express any opinion.

The nobleman stopped on the landing. Although age had wrinkled his brow and his face, yellowed his complexion, and whitened his hair, it was still easy to recognise in him the original of the portrait which had attracted Isabella's attention in her distress, and to which she had turned supplicatingly as to a friendly face. It was the Prince, Vallombreuse's father; the son bearing the title of a duchy until such time as the natural course of events should make him the head of the house in his turn.

At the sight of Isabella, supported by Herod and Sigognac, and whose pallor gave her the look of one dead, the Prince raised his hands to heaven and said with a sigh : —

“ I have arrived too late, in spite of all my efforts.”

Then he bent down over the young actress and took her hand. On that hand, white as if carved in alabaster, sparkled on the third finger a ring, in which was set a large amethyst. The old nobleman appeared strangely moved at the sight of the ring and drew it tremblingly from Isabella's finger. He signed to one of the lackeys to draw nearer, and by the light of the



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candle he examined the coat of arms engraved upon the stone, now putting it close to the light and now holding it at a little distance in order the better to note its every detail with his failing sight.

Sigognac, Herod, and Lampourde anxiously watched the Prince's strange actions and marked the changes of expression on his face as he examined the gem with which he appeared to be so familiar, and which he kept turning over and over as if unable to reconcile himself to some painful conclusion.

At last he shouted in a voice of thunder: —

“Where is Vallombreuse? Where is that monster, the shame of my house?”

He had, beyond peradventure, recognised the ring as being the one on which was engraved a fancy shield used by him in former days to seal the notes he was in the habit of writing to Cornelia, Isabella's mother. How did this ring happen to be worn by the young actress abducted by Vallombreuse, and how had it come into her possession?

“Could she possibly be Cornelia's daughter,— and my own daughter therefore?” the Prince asked himself anxiously. “The profession of actress she follows, her age, her face, in which I can recognise her



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mother's lineaments softened by youth, everything combines to make me believe it must be so. Then it was his own sister whom that foul libertine was pursuing ! His love was incestuous ! This is indeed cruel punishment for a sin of long ago ! ”

At last Isabella opened her eyes, and the first object she beheld was the Prince holding the ring he had removed from her finger. The face seemed familiar to her, but she recollected it youthful, and without gray hair or beard. At the sight of him she felt her heart filled with deepest veneration. She saw also at her side brave Sigognac and kind Herod, both safe and sound, and the feeling of safety dispelled her terrors. She need fear no more either for her friends or herself. Partially sitting up, she bowed to the Prince, who was watching her with intense attention and seemed to look in the features of the young girl for the remembrance of a once loved face.

“ From whom,” said he to her, in a voice filled with emotion, “ did you receive this ring ? It recalls certain remembrances to me. Have you long had it ? ”

“ I have had it since my earliest childhood,” answered Isabella. “ It is the one and only thing of my mother's that is left to me.”



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“Who was your mother? And what was her profession?” went on the Prince with increased interest.

“She was called Cornelia,” replied Isabella shyly, “and she was merely a strolling player who took the parts of queens and princesses in tragedy in this very company of which I form part.”

“Cornelia!” exclaimed the Prince, deeply moved. “There can be no doubt that I am right.”

Then, mastering his feelings, he resumed his majestic and calm look, and said to Isabella:—

“Allow me to retain this ring; I shall give it back to you at the proper time.”

“It could not be better than in your lordship’s hands,” replied the young actress, recalling, amid the dim and distant remembrances of her childhood, a face that she had seen bending over her cradle.

“Gentlemen,” said the Prince, fixing his clear, firm glance upon Sigognac and his companions, “under any other circumstances I might well wonder at finding you here with arms in your hands; but I am acquainted with the reason that has led you to invade a home until now held sacred. Violence invites and justifies violence. I shall forget what has happened.



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But where is the Duke de Vallombreuse, the degenerate son who dishonours my gray hairs?"

As if answering his father's call, Vallombreuse appeared at that very moment upon the threshold of the room, supported by Malartic. He was ghastly pale, and nervously pressed a handkerchief to his breast. It was true that he was walking, but as spectres walk, without raising his feet from the ground; it was only his tremendous will, the exercise of which imparted a marble-like rigidity to his features, that enabled him to keep up. He had heard his father's voice, and depraved though he was, he still feared his sire, and hoped to succeed in concealing his wound from him. He was biting his lips to keep back his groans, and swallowed the bloody froth that rose to his lips. He even managed to take off his hat, in spite of the atrocious pain caused by the raising of his arm, and he remained thus bare-headed and silent.

"Sir," said the Prince, "your excesses have gone beyond all bounds, and your conduct has become such that I shall be compelled to request the King to grant me the favour of exiling you or imprisoning you for life. Abduction, sequestration, and rape are not comprised under the designation of love-making; and while



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I may make allowance for the wildness of a licentious youth, I can never pardon a coolly planned crime. Do you know, you monster," added the Prince, approaching Vallombreuse and speaking in his ear so as to be inaudible to every one else, "do you know who the girl, the Isabella whom you abducted in spite of her virtuous resistance, is? — your sister!"

"May she, then, take the place of the son whom you are about to lose," replied Vallombreuse, overcome by faintness, and his face wet with the death-sweat. "I am not, however, as guilty as you think. Isabella is pure; I swear it by the God before whom I am about to appear. A man does not lie when at death's door, and you may trust the word of a dying nobleman."

These words he spoke loud enough to be heard by every one present. Isabella turned her lovely, tear-wet eyes to Sigognac, and read on that true lover's face that he had not waited for Vallombreuse's dying declaration to believe in the virtue of the woman he adored.

"Why, what is the matter with you?" said the Prince, holding out his hand to the young Duke, who, notwithstanding that he was supported by Malartic, was sinking to the ground.



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“Nothing, father,” replied Vallombreuse, in a scarcely audible voice. “Nothing — I am dying.”

And with the words he fell in a heap upon the stone flagging without Malartic being able to prevent him.

“He has not fallen on his nose,” said Lampourde, quietly. “He has merely fainted and he may pull through. We swordsmen know a good deal more about such matters than apothecaries and leeches.”

“A physician! a physician!” cried the Prince, forgetting his anger at the sight of the young fellow on the floor. “There may be hope yet. I will make the fortune of the man who saves my son, the last of a noble house. Away with you! What are you standing about for? Off with you! Run!”

Two of the lackeys who had watched the scene, impassible and without moving a muscle, stepped forward from the wall and hastened to carry out their lord’s orders.

Other servants, taking every possible precaution, lifted Vallombreuse and, by direction of the Prince, carried him to his room, where they laid him on his bed.

The old gentleman followed the pitiful procession with a glance in which grief already overcame wrath. He saw his family ending in that son whom he loved



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and abhorred at one and the same time, but whose vices he forgot just then in favour of his brilliant qualities. Deep gloom filled his soul, and he remained for a time sunk in a silence which all around respected.

Isabella, having entirely recovered from her fainting fit, was standing with downcast eyes by Sigognac and Herod, endeavouring to repair the disorder of her dress. Lampourde and Scappino, somewhat in the background, effaced themselves like figures of secondary importance, while through the open door were to be seen the ruffians who had taken part in the fight, and who were somewhat doubtful of the fate that awaited them, dreading to be sent to the galleys or the gibbet in return for the help they had given Vallombreuse in his criminal enterprise.

At last the Prince broke the silence that had become painful, and said: —

“Leave the castle at once, every one of you who have put your swords at the service of my son’s evil passions. My rank forbids my undertaking the duties of the police and the executioner. Away with you; vanish; return to your dens, where justice will have no difficulty in finding you.”

The form of dismissal was not very gracious, but it



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would have been ill-timed to exhibit any great susceptibility. The ruffians, whom Lampourde had relieved of their bonds at the outset of the scene, stood not upon the order of their going, but made off speedily, with Malartic in the lead.

When they had withdrawn, Vallombreuse's father took Isabella by the hand, drew her away from her companions, placed her close by himself, and said:—

“Remain there, Miss; your place is henceforth by my side. The least you can do is to restore a daughter to me, since you deprive me of a son.”

And he wiped away a tear that in spite of himself had begun to trickle down his cheek.

Then turning towards Sigognac with a superbly noble gesture,—

“Sir,” he said, “you and your companions may withdraw. Isabella has nothing to fear by her father's side, and this castle will be her home henceforth. Now that her birth has become known, it is not seemly that my daughter should return to Paris. I have paid dearly enough for her to have the right to keep her. I thank you, even though it costs me the hope of seeing my line continued, for having prevented my son committing a shameful deed, nay, an abominable crime. I



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would rather have my shield stained with blood than soiled with filth. Vallombreuse having made himself infamous, you were in the right in slaying him. You acted like a true nobleman, and I am told that you are one, in protecting helplessness, innocence, and virtue. You had the right to do so, and my daughter's honour made safe by you compensates for the death of my son. I feel all this, yet the father's heart rebels, and it may be that unjust desire of vengeance may assail and overmaster me. Pray go; I shall not pursue you, and I shall do my best to forget that you were compelled to use your sword against my son."

"My lord," answered Sigognac, in a tone of deepest respect. "I make such large allowance for a father's grief that I would have listened in silence to the bitterest, to the most stinging remarks, although I feel that in this disastrous conflict I have nothing to reproach myself with. I do not wish to say aught that might be construed into an accusation against the unfortunate Duke de Vallombreuse, even for the purpose of setting myself right in your eyes. But I do pray you to believe that I did not seek him out; that he himself purposely traversed my path; that on more than one occasion I



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have done my utmost to spare him. In this very meeting, it was his own blind fury that made him rush upon my sword-point. I leave Isabella in your hands ; she is dearer to me than life itself ; and I withdraw filled with woe at the painful victory I have won, and which proves in truth to be a defeat, since it wrecks my happiness. Would I had been the victim, the one slain, rather than the murderer ! ”

Sigognac bowed to the Prince, and casting upon Isabella a long glance filled with love and regret, he descended the stairs, followed by Lampourde and Scappino. He looked round more than once, and thus it was he saw the girl leaning against the rail to keep from fainting, and pressing to her eyes her tear-wet handkerchief. Was it her brother’s death or Sigognac’s departure that was the cause of her woe ? For myself, I opine that it was the latter, for the aversion Vallombreuse had inspired in her was yet too recent to have changed into affection on suddenly learning of their relationship to each other. The Baron, at least, diffident though he was, came to the same conclusion, and, so strange is the human heart, the tears of the woman he loved proved a consolation to him as he went away.

The Baron and his companions left the castle by the



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drawbridge, and while they were proceeding along the moat, on their way to get their horses in the little wood where they had left them, they heard a plaintive voice issuing from the moat at the very place where the great tree had fallen. It was the doorkeeper of the company, who had been unable to extricate himself from the network of branches, and who was piteously calling for help. His head alone was above water, and he ran the risk, every time he opened his mouth to implore assistance, of swallowing the tasteless stuff which he hated more than poison. Scappino, very light and quick, ventured upon the tree and speedily fished out the doorkeeper dripping wet and covered with water-plants.

The horses had not moved away from their covert, and their riders having sprung into their saddles, they trotted gaily towards Paris.

“What think you, Sir Baron, of all these events?” said Herod to Sigognac, who was riding by his side. “The whole business has ended like a tragi-comedy. No one could have foreseen the arrival, in the very worst of the row, of a noble father preceded by torch-bearers, coming to put a stop to his son’s outrageous pranks. Then look at the recognition of Isabella by



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means of a ring with a coat of arms engraved upon it. Just the sort of thing we have seen on the stage; and after all, as it is the business of the stage to hold the mirror up to nature, it is only right and proper that real life should be like stage life. It has always been understood in the company that Isabella was of noble birth, and Blazius and Leonardo, indeed, remembered seeing the Prince, then a Duke only, at the time when he paid court to Cornelia. Leonardo more than once advised the girl to seek her father out, but Isabella, being shy and reserved, did not do so; she was satisfied with her humble condition, and not desirous of pushing herself into a family that might have disowned her."

"I was aware of these facts," answered Sigognac. "Although she attached no importance to her illustrious origin, Isabella had told me the story of her mother and spoken of the ring. Besides, it was easy to judge from her refinement of feeling that she had noble blood in her veins. I should have guessed at the fact, even had she not told me of it; her chaste, refined, delicate beauty testified to her high breeding. Consequently, and in spite of the fact that one is apt to be rather free in making love to actresses, my love for her was always



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mingled with timidity and respect. But how cursedly unlucky it is that Vallombreuse should turn out to be her own brother ! Now his dead body separates us ; and yet the only way to save her honour was to slay him. I am a most unfortunate wretch, for I have myself created the obstacle that wrecks my love, and the sword that defended my darling has destroyed my hope. In order to save her whom I adore I have put her away from me for ever. How could I present myself with blood-imbrued hands to Isabella in mourning ? It is true that the blood I have shed was shed in her defence, yet it is her brother's. Even if she were to pardon me and to look upon me without horror, the Prince, who has the rights of a father over her, would repel his son's murderer with a curse. I was born under a most unlucky star ! ”

“ The whole business is indeed most painful,” returned Herod ; “ yet the Cid and Ximena were in far worse condition, as may be seen in the play by Master Pierre de Corneille. Nevertheless, after many a long struggle between love and duty, matters were satisfactorily arranged, not without somewhat forced antitheses and conceits after the Spanish mode, which are effective on the stage. Vallombreuse is but a half-



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brother of Isabella's, after all. They were not born of the same mother, and they met as relatives for but a very few minutes, a circumstance calculated to diminish resentment very greatly. Further, the young lady had the deepest abhorrence of that mad gentleman, who pursued her with his violent and scandalous attentions. The Prince himself was not greatly pleased with his son, who was cruel as Nero, dissolute as Heliogabalus, and perverse as Satan. But for his being a duke, he would have been hanged twenty times over. Don't you give way to despair. Matters may turn out more happily than you have any idea of."

"Heaven grant it, my kind Herod," said Sigognac. "But I am naturally unlucky; evil fairies and ill fortune presided over my birth. It would really have been better for me to have been killed, since her father's arrival made Isabella safe without involving Vallombreuse's death. And I may as well tell you the whole truth. When I saw that handsome young fellow, so full of life, fire, and passion fall straight, stiff, cold, and wan at my feet, I felt the icy chill of secret horror strike to my very marrow. It is an awful thing to have slain a man, Herod; and although I have no remorse, since I have committed no crime, I cannot



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help seeing Vallombreuse stretched out, his hair lying loose upon the step, and a red stain on his breast."

"That is all nonsense," said Herod. "You slew him according to rule, and your conscience may rest in peace. A good gallop will dispel all these scruples, due to a touch of fever and the chill of night. The one thing we have to set about without loss of time is leaving Paris, for the death of Vallombreuse will make talk both at Court and in town, however carefully it may be attempted to conceal it; and little loved though he was, you might still be involved in trouble on his account. Now, then, a truce to talk; let us spur up our animals and get over the strip of road that stretches out before us in the moonlight, gray and monotonous, between the two rows of broomsticks."

The horses, duly urged with the heel, pushed on faster; but while they are proceeding onwards, let us return to the castle, now as quiet as it had shortly before been noisy, and enter the room where the servants had laid Vallombreuse upon his bed. It was lighted by a candelabrum placed upon a small table; the rays fell upon the bed, where lay the young Duke, motionless as if dead, and paler by contrast with the crimson hue of the curtains and the red reflections of



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the silk. The walls were panelled breast-high with ebony, inlaid with brass, forming a skirting for a costly tapestry representing the story of Medea and Jason, and filled with all manner of murders and sinister incidents. In one place Medea was seen cutting Peleas in pieces, under pretext of renewing his youth as Æson's had been. In another, a jealous wife and an unnatural mother, she was slaying her own children, and on still another panel, she was shown flying away, intoxicated with vengeance, upon a car drawn by dragons belching forth fire. The tapestry was undoubtedly beautiful, costly, and wrought by a cunning hand; but the fierce mythology it retraced had a grim and cruel aspect that betrayed a naturally ferocious disposition in the man who had selected it. At the back of the bed, the curtains being drawn aside, was seen Jason fighting the monstrous brazen bulls, guardians of the Golden Fleece; and Vallombreuse, lying senseless beneath, looked like one of their victims.

Garments most elegant and sumptuous, which had been tried on and then thrown aside, were scattered upon the chairs. In a tall Japanese vase, covered with designs in blue and red, standing upon a table of ebony,—the wood used for all the furniture in the room,—



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was placed a splendid bouquet, composed of the finest flowers and intended to take the place of the one Isabella had refused. It had failed to reach its destination, however, on account of the unexpected attack upon the castle. The superb flowers in full bloom, a yet fresh token of amorous passion, contrasted strangely with the motionless body, and a moralist would have found matter enough in the fact for endless talk.

The Prince, seated in an arm-chair by the bed, was gazing with mournful look upon the face, white as the lace pillow that swelled up around it. The very pallor caused the features to show more delicate and refined. The grosser touch life stamps upon a human face had disappeared in marmorean serenity, and never had Vallombreuse been handsomer than at this moment. His lips, no longer rosy but purple, seemed to give passage to not the faintest breath. As he gazed upon the fair form so soon to be reduced to dust, the Prince forgot that a devil's soul had but just left it, and he thought sadly of the illustrious name which had come down honoured through the ages, but which would not go down to future generations. It was not the death of his son alone that he mourned ; it was the extinction of his line, a grief spared to the bourgeois



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and to the lowly. He held the young man's ice-cold hand in his own, and feeling some warmth in it, did not recollect that he was himself the source of it, and he indulged all the more fondly in his vain hope.

At the foot of the bed stood Isabella, her hands clasped, and praying with all the strength of her being for the brother of whose death she was the innocent cause, and who was paying with his life for having loved not wisely but too well; a crime readily forgiven by women, especially when they themselves are the cause of it.

“And no physician yet!” said the Prince impatiently.
“There might still be a chance.”

Even as he spoke the words, the door opened and the surgeon, accompanied by a pupil carrying his case of instruments, entered. He bowed slightly, and without a word went straight to the bed whereon the young Duke lay, felt his pulse, put his hand on the heart, and seemed discouraged. Nevertheless, in order to make scientifically sure of his diagnosis, he drew from his pocket a small mirror of burnished steel, placed it in front of Vallombreuse's lips, and carefully examined the surface. It was faintly dimmed. Surprised, the



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physician repeated the experiment, and again the steel was dimmed. Isabella and the Prince watched anxiously the motions of the surgeon, whose face had lost its look of discouragement.

“Life is not quite extinct,” said he at last, as he turned towards the Prince, and repolished his mirror. “The Duke is still breathing, and as long as death has not laid its hand upon the patient, we have a right to hope. Do not, however, indulge in premature rejoicing, for your grief would be but the deeper. The Duke de Vallombreuse has not drawn his last breath; that is the most I can say; but it is a long way from that to restoring him to health. Now I shall examine the wound, which possibly is not mortal, since he was not slain upon the spot.”

“Do not remain, Isabella,” said the Prince. “The sight is too gruesome and trying for a girl. You shall be told what the doctor says, once his examination is concluded.”

The young lady withdrew, preceded by a lackey who showed her to another apartment, the room she had occupied being in a state of great disorder and the furniture damaged in the fight that had taken place.



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With the assistance of his pupil the leech undid Vallombreuse's doublet, cut the shirt open, and laid bare the breast, white as ivory, on which showed a small triangular wound and a few drops of blood. The bleeding had been slight and internal rather than external. The physician parted the lips of the wound and sounded it. The features of the patient contracted slightly, but his eyes remained shut, and he lay motionless as a statue on a tombstone in a family vault.

“That is a good sign,” said the leech, noting the contraction due to pain. “He feels, therefore he lives, and the sensitiveness is a good omen.”

“He will live, will he not?” said the Prince. “If you save him, I shall make you a rich man; I shall gratify your every wish; you shall have whatever you choose to ask.”

“There is plenty of time for that,” returned the physician. “So far, I cannot promise anything; the sword has pierced the upper part of the right lung, and the case is serious, exceedingly serious. On the other hand, as your son is young, healthy, robust, and endowed with a constitution that but for this unhappy wound might warrant him a century of life, it is possible that he will pull through, unless unforeseen



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complications set in. There have been instances of recovery under similar circumstances ; for nature has a good chance with young fellows, and the sap of life still ascending has many a way of making up for losses and repairing damage. I shall now try to free the chest of the blood which has spread internally, and which would end by suffocating the Duke, had he not fortunately fallen into the hands of a scientific man, not frequently to be met with in châteaux and villages at a distance from Paris. I shall make use of blisters and cuts. Come, fellow," he went on, speaking to his pupil, "Instead of glaring at me with those goggle eyes of yours, roll up the strips and fold compresses, so that I may dress the wound."

The operation over, the surgeon said to the Prince :

" I beg you will order a camp-bed to be set up in a corner of the room and some food to be brought, for my pupil and I will have to watch the Duke in turns. It is necessary for me to be on the spot, to note every symptom, to check it if it be unfavourable, and to aid it if it be the reverse. You may trust me, my lord, and you may rest assured that whatever human science can do to save life, will be done boldly yet prudently. I beg you will withdraw to your apart-



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ments. I answer for your son's life — at least until the morning."

Somewhat reassured by the surgeon's words, the Prince retired to his room, where a lackey brought him every hour bulletins stating the young Duke's condition.

In the new room assigned her, Isabella found the same maid awaiting her to help her to undress who had waited upon her previously in such grim and repellent fashion. Now, however, the expression of the girl's face had completely changed; her eyes shone with strange glitter, and her face was radiant with gratified hatred. The mute spectre had been changed into a living woman, for an unspoken outrage, borne with silently, with the concentrated rage of powerlessness, had at last been avenged. She brushed Isabella's lovely hair with ill-disguised delight, put her night-dress on her with complacency, knelt down to take off her shoes and stockings, and was as caressing now as she had been rough before. Her lips, so firmly closed on the previous occasion, uttered endless questions, but Isabella, preoccupied and engrossed by the rush of events that had filled the evening, paid little heed to her, and did not note the contracted brows and the angry look of the girl when a lackey entered with the news that the



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Duke's life was not wholly despaired of. On hearing this, the joy faded from her sombre features, that had lighted up for a moment, and she relapsed into her gloomy ways until her mistress dismissed her with a kindly gesture.

As she lay in her comfortable bed, a fit altar to Morpheus, but that failed nevertheless to bring her sleep at once, Isabella sought to clear up her own feelings with regard to the sudden change in her fortunes. But yesterday she had been a poor actress, known only under the stage name printed on the posters at the street corners. Now she was acknowledged by a great lord as his daughter, and she, the lowly bloom, was grafted on one of the boughs of that mighty genealogical tree the roots of which plunged so deep into the past and every branch of which bore some famous man or some hero. A venerable Prince, second only to crowned heads, was her father. The terrible Duke de Vallombreuse, so handsome in spite of his perversity, was changed from a lover into a brother, and no doubt, if he survived his wound, his passion would melt into pure and tranquil fraternal love. The castle, but recently her prison, was transformed into her home; she was in her own residence, and the servants obeyed her with



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a respect in which there was no longer any trace of constraint or simulation. The wildest dreams of vaulting ambition had been fulfilled in her case without her having any share in the operation. The very circumstances that had appeared to threaten her destruction had combined to secure for her a wondrous, dazzling fortune of the most unexpected sort.

Isabella was not surprised to feel great joy fill her soul, so manifold was her happiness. She felt the need of getting used to the new order of things. It may be, too, that she unconsciously regretted her stage life ; but the one thought uppermost in her mind, was the thought of Sigognac. How would the change in her condition affect her position with respect to him ? Would it draw them together, or separate her from that true, devoted, and courageous lover ? When she was poor, she had refused his hand in order not to stand in the way of his fortune ; now that she was rich, it would be a delight to offer him her own. The acknowledged daughter of a prince might well become Baroness de Sigognac. But the Baron had slain Vallombreuse, and they could not clasp hands across the tomb. Even if the young Duke should recover, he might feel lasting resentment on account of his wound,



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even more on account of the defeat he had sustained; for he was more sensitive to a hurt to his pride than to his flesh. Then the Prince, also, might very well, kind and generous though he was, look askance at the man who had nearly robbed him of his son, or he might have other plans for Isabella. But in her own heart, the young girl swore to herself that she would remain true to the man who had loved her as an actress, and enter a convent rather than marry a Duke, a Count, or a Marquis, no matter whether the suitor were handsome as the angels and endowed with all the graces and qualities of a favourite of the good fairies.

Satisfied with this resolution, she was about to fall asleep, when a slight sound caused her to open her eyes. She perceived Chiquita, standing at the foot of her bed, gazing upon her in silent meditation.

“What do you want, little one?” said Isabella, in her sweetest tones. “Did you not go with the others? If you would like to stay with me, I shall gladly keep you, for you have done me good service.”

“I love you dearly,” replied Chiquita, “but I cannot remain with you as long as Agostino lives. On the Albacete blades are inscribed the words *Soy de un dueno*, which mean *I own but one master*,— noble words, well



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fitted to the trusty steel. Yet I do want something. If you really think I have paid you for the pearl necklace, kiss me. No one has ever kissed me, and I think it must be so nice."

"With all my heart," said Isabella, catching the child's head in her hands and kissing her brown cheeks that flushed with the intensity of her satisfaction.

"And now good-bye," said Chiquita, recovering her usual coolness.

She was about to slip out noiselessly as she had entered, when she caught sight, upon the table, of the knife she had taught the young actress to use in the event of her requiring to do so by way of protecting herself against Vallombreuse, and she said to Isabella: —

"Give me back the knife; you do not need it any more."

Then she disappeared.

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XVIII

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THE surgeon had answered for Vallombreuse's life until the morrow, and he fulfilled his promise; for when the first beams of day entered the room where the young Duke lay, they found him breathing still. The room itself was in disorder, and blood-stained bandages lay about the tables. The patient had opened his eyes, and his lack-lustre glance was filled with the dim terror of utter weakness. Amid the mists of his swoon the ghastly visage of death had looked out upon him, and at times his eyes, fixed upon a given point, appeared to behold a frightful object invisible to the others. In order to avoid the hallucination, he would resolutely keep them shut, and the vision would then vanish. His face thereafter resumed a less terrified expression, and his gaze again wandered around. His soul was slowly returning



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from the far confines, and the surgeon, his ear placed close to his breast, could perceive the heart beating again with feeble pulsations, faint tokens of life audible to the practised scientific ear only. The half-parted lips allowed the white teeth to show and seemed to smile vaguely, in a way that was sadder to behold than the expression of pain, for it was the smile that flits on human lips at the near approach of eternal sleep. There were, however, faintest rosy flushes amid the purple tones, that showed the blood was again beginning to course in the veins.

Standing by the wounded man's bedside, Master Laurent, the leech, was busy noting these symptoms, so difficult to seize upon, with close perspicacity and attention. He was a learned man, and it was only the lack of some important case that had hitherto prevented his becoming as famous as he deserved to be. Until this time he had had to practise chiefly *in animâ vili*, and had cured mainly people of low degree, townsmen, soldiers, clerks, attorneys, and other inferior members of the legal profession, whose death or recovery was of no importance whatever. He therefore attached enormous importance to saving the young Duke's life. His self-love and his ambition were equally interested in his



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duel with death, and in order to retain for himself the whole praise and triumph, he had assured the Prince, who wished to send to Paris for the most famous practitioners, that he could undertake the cure unaided, and that there was nothing more dangerous in so serious a case as a change of treatment.

“No, indeed, he shall not die,” said he to himself, as he examined the young Duke. “He has not the death-look on his face ; his limbs are still supple, and he has passed successfully through the early morning period of anguish which strengthens sickness and induces a fatal crisis. Besides, he has got to live, for his recovery means fame and fortune to me. I shall snatch him from the hands of the old Terror, that handsome heir of a noble race ! Sculptors shall have to wait long ere they are summoned to carve his monument, and he, in turn, shall enable me to leave this village where I am vegetating. Now let me try, first and foremost, even at the risk of bringing on fever, to restore his strength by the administration of an energetic cordial.”

He opened his case of medicines himself, for his assistant, having sat up a part of the night, was sound asleep on the improvised camp-bed. He drew from it



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a number of phials containing essences coloured in diverse shades, some red as rubies, others emerald green, others golden yellow, and others transparent as diamonds. Latin names, abridged, and looking to an uninitiated person like cabalistic formulæ, were pasted upon the glass of the phials. Although Master Laurent was quite confident of what he was doing, he read several times over the names of the phials he had set apart, looked at their contents in the light, turning to account for this purpose a sunbeam that filtered in through the curtains, weighed the quantity he took from each bottle in a silver measure the weight of which was known to him, and composed out of the various ingredients a potion in accordance with a recipe the secret of which he carefully guarded.

Having prepared his mixture, he awoke his assistant, and ordered him to raise Vallombreuse's head a little. He next forced apart, with a small spatula, the wounded man's teeth, and managed to introduce into his mouth the narrow neck of the phial. A few drops of the liquid trickled down the young Duke's palate, and the bitterness of the draught caused his motionless features to contract slightly. A little flowed down his throat, then a little more, presently more yet, and



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finally the entire dose, to the doctor's great satisfaction, was swallowed without overmuch difficulty. As Vallombreuse drank, a faint flush began to colour his cheeks; he endeavoured to move his hand lying inert upon the sheet, sighed, and cast around him, like a person awaking from a dream, a look in which consciousness was visible.

“I played for heavy stakes,” said Master Laurent to himself. “This medicine is a philter that kills or cures. This time it has cured, thanks be returned to Æsculapius, Hygeia, and Hippocrates.”

At this moment the tapestry that formed the portière was gently drawn aside, and the Prince's venerable face, worn out and made older-looking by the anguish of the night than it would have been by ten years of life, showed under its folds.

“Well, Master Laurent?” he whispered in anxious tones.

The surgeon placed one finger on his lips, and with the other hand pointed to Vallombreuse, raised somewhat upon his pillow, and no longer cadaverous-looking, for the potion was burning him and reviving him.

Master Laurent, walking with the soft tread peculiar to persons in the habit of nursing the sick, came to the



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Prince where the latter stood at the door, and drew him a little to one side.

“ You see, my lord,” said he, “ that the Duke’s condition, far from having become worse, has improved markedly. Of course he is not out of the wood yet, but unless an unexpected complication arises — and I am doing my best to avert that — I think he will pull through, and will be able to pursue his noble career as if nothing had happened.”

The Prince’s face lighted up with deep paternal emotion, but as he stepped into the room to embrace his son, Master Laurent respectfully laid his hand on his arm and stopped him : —

“ Allow me, your Highness, to oppose your carrying out a most natural wish. Physicians are a nuisance at times, and the medical art is compelled oft to be cruel in order to be kind. I beseech you not to enter the Duke’s room, for your presence, at once desired and feared, might bring on a dangerous turn. Any emotion at this time would be fatal to him, for it would snap the slight thread by which he clings to life. In a few days, when the wound has cicatrised and he has regained some strength, you shall freely enjoy the happiness of seeing him and speaking to him.”



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The Prince, reassured and recognising the soundness of the physician's contention, withdrew to his apartment, where he remained engaged in devotional reading until the hour of noon, when the majordomo appeared and informed him that "his lordship's dinner was on the table."

"Request my daughter, the Countess Isabella de Lineuil — that is the style and title by which she is henceforth to be addressed — to come down to dinner," said the Prince to the majordomo, who hastened to carry out the order.

Isabella traversed the antechamber in which stood the panoplies, the cause of her nocturnal terror, but she did not think it at all gloomy in the broad daylight, which came in by the tall windows, the shutters having been thrown open. The room had been aired, and a great blaze of juniper and other odorous woods, burning in the fireplace, had dispelled the close and mouldy smell of the place. The master's presence had restored life to the old hall.

The dining-room also was utterly changed, and the table that the night before seemed laid for a spectral meal was now covered with a rich tablecloth, the folds thereon forming symmetrical squares, and it looked



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uncommonly well, laden as it was with old silver plate richly chased and engraved with coats of arms, with Bohemian glass flagons diapered with gold, spiral-stemmed Venetian glasses, spice-boxes, and dishes from which arose the most delightful odours.

Huge logs placed on the andirons, formed of superimposed polished metal balls, blazed up the great back-plate, emblazoned with the Prince's arms, in mighty whirls of flame that mingled with merry crackling of sparks, and cast a pleasant warmth throughout the vast hall. The plate on the dressers, the gilt and silver on the Cordova leather hangings, flashed and sparkled ruddy in the light of the fire in spite of the light of day.

When Isabella entered, the Prince was already in his chair, the high back of which was finished in the form of a dais. Behind him stood two lackeys in full livery. The young lady curtsied modestly to her father in a way that did not in the least smack of the stage, and that would have been commended by any high-born lady. A servant placed a chair for her, and she sat down opposite the Prince, at the place he pointed out, without exhibiting any particular embarrassment.



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The soup having been served, the equerry-carver carved on a side table the dishes brought from the table by an officer of the pantry, and the valets then took them back ready for the guests.

One of the servants helped Isabella to wine, which she drank only largely diluted with water, like the sober and self-restrained person she was. But still feeling the effect of the excitement of the previous day and night, dazzled and disturbed by the sudden change in her fortunes, anxious about her brother lying grievously wounded, and perturbed concerning Sigognac's fate, she merely trifled with the dishes placed before her.

“You are neither eating nor drinking, Countess,” said the Prince. “Will you not try this chicken-wing?”

On hearing herself called Countess in a tone at once friendly and serious, Isabella turned upon the Prince her beautiful blue eyes, with a glance of shy wonder and interrogation.

“Yes, Countess de Lineuil; it is the name of an estate which I bestow upon you, for charming though the name of Isabella be, it cannot be borne by my daughter by itself.”



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Isabella, yielding to an irresistible movement of her heart, rose, passed to the other end of the table, and kneeling by the Prince's side, took his hand and kissed it in acknowledgment of his delicate attention.

“Rise, my daughter,” said the Prince, with emotion, “and resume your seat; I am doing no more than is right. Fate alone has prevented my doing it earlier, and the terrible circumstances which have brought us all together seem to have been divinely ordered. Your virtue prevented the committing of a great crime, and I love you for your action, even if it cost me my son's life. But surely God will spare him, so that he may repent of having outraged truest innocence. Master Laurent holds out hopes, and so far as I could observe from the threshold of the room, whence I could see Vallombreuse in his bed, he did not appear to me to have on his face the death-look which we old warriors recognise so readily.”

A magnificent silver ewer was passed round for the diners to wash their hands, and the Prince, throwing down his serviette, went to the drawing-room, to which Isabella followed him in obedience to a sign from him. The aged nobleman sat down by the mantelpiece, a carved monumental pile that rose to the very ceiling,



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and his daughter sat by him on a faldstool. The servants having withdrawn, the Prince tenderly took her hands in his, and remained for some time looking closely at the daughter he had recovered in so strange a fashion. His expression was one of mingled joy and sadness, for, notwithstanding the reassuring report of the medico, Vallombreuse's life still hung on a thread. He had reason to be happy, but he had also reason to dread. Soon, however, Isabella's lovely face dispelled his painful thoughts, and the Prince addressed himself in the following terms to the new Countess : —

“ I have no doubt, my dear child, that in the course of the events which have reunited us in so strange, romantic, and supernatural a manner, it must have occurred to you that I made no effort to find you during the time which has elapsed since your childhood until now, and that it is merely a chance meeting that has brought together the lost child and the forgetful father. But that would be doing me an injustice, and your disposition is so kindly that you must have quickly put away that thought. As you are aware, your mother Cornelia was a woman of proud and arrogant spirit. She displayed in everything extraordinary violence, and when most important reasons, I may say reasons of



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State, compelled me to part from her, very much against my will, in order to contract a marriage in obedience to a last wish, the equivalent of an order that is not to be resisted, she obstinately rejected, carried away by anger and disappointment, every proposal to secure her comfort and your future. She returned to me with insulting disdain estates, mansions, bonds, money, and jewels. Her disinterestedness, which I greatly admired, was matched by my resolution, and I placed in the hands of a person I could trust the moneys and bonds she had returned, so that they might be at her disposal in the event of her changing her mind. But she persisted in her refusal, changed her name, and joined another company, with which she travelled through the provinces, avoiding Paris and the places where I happened to be. I soon lost all trace of her, for the King, my master, appointed me to embassies and other difficult missions which kept me abroad for many years. On my return, I learned through agents at once intelligent and reliable, who had made it their business to question members of various theatrical companies and to induce them to talk, that Cornelia had died shortly before. As for the child, they had learned nothing of her and no one knew what



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had become of her. The continual moving about of such companies, the stage names adopted by the actors who form part of them, and which they often change, either from necessity or from caprice, make it very difficult to carry on such inquiries by means of agents. A slight clue which would be enough for the person most interested is apt to appear valueless to an agent working for money only. I was told of more than one little girl in companies of this kind, but the circumstances of their birth did not correspond with those of your own. Indeed, mothers who cared little enough about keeping their children with them, suggested that their progeny was the child I was in search of, and I had to be on my guard against tricks of this sort. The moneys placed in trust for you had not been touched, and it was plain that Cornelia, nursing her wrath against me, had determined to avenge herself by keeping my daughter from me. I was forced to conclude that you were dead, but a secret instinct told me you were still alive. I remembered how pretty and sweet you used to look in your cradle, and how you used to pull at my mustache, which was black in those days, with your little rosy fingers whenever I bent down to kiss you. The birth of my son revived instead of deadening my



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remembrance of you. I could not help thinking, as I watched him growing up in the midst of luxury, dressed out in lace and ribbons like a king's son, and playing with toys the price of which would have made many an honest family rich, that perhaps at that very moment, dressed in some worn-out theatrical rags, you were suffering from cold and hunger in a cart, or in a barn open to the four winds of heaven. 'If she is alive,' I would say to myself, 'I suppose some manager is ill-treating and beating her. Hanging from a brass wire and half dead from fright, she is filling the part of a Cupid or a genie in a scenic play. Her tears, scarce restrained, are furrowing the pearl powder with which her cheeks have been covered, or else, trembling with emotion, she is lisping in the smoky light of the candles the lines of a childish part that has already won for her many a box on the ears.' Then I would regret not having taken you from your mother on the very day of your birth; it is true that at the time I believed nothing would ever come between our love and us. Later on, I suffered in still another way. I thought of the innumerable attacks on your virtue to which, in the course of a wandering and unprotected life, you must be exposed, on account of your beauty, at the hands of



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the libertines who turn to actresses as insects fly to the light; then I would flush with wrath at the idea that my blood, which flows in your veins, was exposed to such outrages. Many a time, affecting a liking for the drama I in no wise felt, I would go to the theatre and try to discover among the *ingénues* a girl of the age you would be and beautiful as I made sure you were. But I beheld rouged and powdered faces only, and the effrontery of courtesans under the affectation of innocence. Not one of these brazen hussies could possibly be you.

“ I had, therefore, regretfully abandoned the hope of finding the daughter whose presence would have brightened my declining years. The Princess, my wife, who died three years after our marriage, had borne to me but one child, my son Vallombreuse, whose violent disposition caused me the greatest anxiety. A few days ago, being at Saint-Germain in attendance on His Majesty, in accordance with the duties of my office, I heard some of the courtiers singing the praises of Herod’s troupe, and their account inspired me with the desire to witness for myself one of the performances of the company, said to be the best that had come from the provinces to Paris for a very long time past. Particular



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praise was bestowed upon a certain Isabella, on account of her naturalness, her modesty, and her excellent and naively simple way of acting. It was also said that the part of a modest, innocent girl which she took on the stage, was that which she held to in private life, and the wickedest gossips had not a word to say against her character. Filled with a secret presentiment, I repaired to the hall where these players were performing, and I saw you play to the universal satisfaction of the audience. Your air of a well-bred young girl, your timid and modest ways, the fresh and silvery tones of your voice filled me with strange emotion. It is impossible for a father to recognise in the lovely young woman of twenty the child he has not seen since it was in its cradle, especially in the blaze of the foot-lights and in the dazzling illusion of the stage; yet it seemed to me that if Fate were to drive a girl of high birth to the stage, she would have precisely such a reserved and discreet mien, keeping the other players at a distance, a look of high breeding which would lead every one to say, 'How does that girl happen to be there?'

"In the same play figured a Pedant whose rubicund nose was not wholly unknown to me, and I remembered that it was he who used to play the parts of



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Pantaloons and foolish old men in the company to which Cornelia belonged. I cannot explain why it was that in imagination I connected you with that pedant who had once been a fellow-actor of your mother's. It was in vain that my sober sense pointed out that the man might very well have joined the company without your being necessarily a member of it; it nevertheless seemed to me that he held in his hand the clue which would enable me to unravel the maze of mysterious events; I therefore resolved to question him, and would have done so but for the fact that when I sent to the inn in the Rue Dauphine I received word that the players of Herod's company had started to give a performance in a château near Paris. I should have quietly awaited the return of the actors, had not a worthy retainer of mine, who feared trouble, informed me that the Duke de Vallombreuse, madly in love with an actress called Isabella, who resisted all his advances with the utmost virtue, had planned to abduct her during the trip to the imaginary château, with the help of a gang of hired ruffians,—a deed that overstepped all bounds in its violence and which might have fatal results, for the young lady was accompanied by friends who went about armed.



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“My suspicions of your real condition threw me, on the receipt of this information, into a most painful state of mind. I shuddered at the thought of a criminal love which was turning into a monstrous love, if my presentiments did not deceive me; for if I was right, you were Vallombreuse’s own sister. I learned that the scoundrels were to fetch you to this castle, and I made all haste to repair hither. You had already been placed in safety; your honour was untouched, and the amethyst ring confirmed all that my own heart believed when I saw you.”

“Believe me, my lord and father,” returned Isabella, “I never reproached you in any way. Accustomed from my childhood to the life of a strolling player, I accepted my fate without a murmur, for I had never known any other condition and did not dream of ever doing so. The little I knew of the world sufficed to make me understand that I should be very ill-advised to claim recognition from an illustrious family, when grave reasons no doubt required that I should be left obscure and forgotten. The faint remembrance of my birth did at times fill me with pride, and I would say to myself, on observing the haughty manner in which great ladies occasionally behave towards actresses,



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‘I also am of noble birth !’ But these foolish vapourings did not last long, and I merely retained the strongest self-respect. Nothing on earth would have induced me to soil the clean blood that flows in my veins, and I felt disgust only at the licentious life of the stage and the attentions paid to actresses, even when they are devoid of beauty. I have lived on the stage as if it were a nunnery, for one can be virtuous anywhere when resolved to be so. The Pedant was like a father to me, and as for Herod, he would have broken the bones of any man who dared touch me or even speak rudely to me. Players though they be, they are most worthy people, and I commend them to your goodness if they are ever in need. I owe it to them in great part that I am able to stand before you without blushing, and to proclaim myself your daughter. My only regret is that I should have been the unfortunate cause of the mishap to the Duke de Vallombreuse, your son, and I wish I could have entered your family under happier auspices.’

“ You have nothing to reproach yourself with, my dear child, for you could not possibly divine the truth in all these mysteries, a truth brought out suddenly by a concourse of circumstances that would be declared



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romantic did one come upon it in a book. The joy I feel at finding you as well fitted to take your place amongst us as though you had not been living amid all the chances of a wandering life and the temptations of a profession not usually very strait-laced, compensates for the pain my son's wound gives me. Whether he lives or dies, I certainly will never blame you for it; and in any case your virtuous resistance spared him the horror of a crime. Let us drop that subject, therefore, and tell me who was, among your liberators, the young fellow who appeared to direct the attack and who wounded Vallombreuse? I suppose he was an actor, although he struck me as a man of high breeding and great courage."

“Yes, father,” replied Isabella, a lovely modest flush mantling her cheeks, “he is an actor. But if I may reveal a secret that has ceased to be one, as far as the Duke is concerned, I shall own that Captain Fracasse — that is the part he plays — conceals under his mask a nobleman’s features, and under his stage appellation an illustrious name.”

“Yes, it seems to me I have heard something to that effect,” said the Prince. “It would indeed have been surprising to find a mere actor rash enough to



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interfere with the Duke de Vallombreuse, and to fight him ; it takes noble blood to inspire such audacity in a man, and a nobleman alone can overcome a nobleman, just as diamond alone can cut diamond.”

The Prince’s aristocratic pride was somewhat soothed by the thought that his son had not been badly wounded by one of low degree, and that matters appeared to have been conducted in regular fashion. The fight was really a duel between persons of equal rank, and the motive for it was a perfectly proper one. There was no danger of harm to the proprieties in such a meeting as that.

“ What is the name of that brave champion,” went on the Prince ; “ of that trusty knight, the protector of innocence ? ”

“ Baron de Sigognac,” answered Isabella in a slightly trembling voice, “ and I do not hesitate to name him, for I know your generosity ; you are too honourable to prosecute him for the unhappy outcome of a victory which no one regrets more deeply than he does.”

“ Sigognac ? ” said the Prince, “ I fancied the family was extinct. Is it not a Gascony house ? ”

“ Yes, father ; his home is near Dax.”



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“The very same, then. The Sigognacs bear punning arms: on a field azure three storks or, two and one. They belong to the very oldest aristocracy; Palamedes de Sigognac distinguished himself in the first crusade, and a Raimbaud de Sigognac, who must have been this young man’s father, was a great friend and comrade of Henry IV in the days of his youth. He did not follow him to Court, his affairs being, it is said, in very bad shape, and there were more blows than halfpence to be got where he of Béarn led.”

“These affairs were in such very bad shape,” went on Isabella, “that when our company, one wet night, was compelled to seek a refuge, we found the son in an old ruinous rookery in which he was wasting away the days of his youth; and we dragged him from that Tower of Misery, fearing he would starve to death there out of pride and melancholy. I have never seen ill-fortune better borne.”

“Poverty does not destroy nobility,” said the Prince; “and any noble house that has preserved its honour may rise again. But why, seeing he was in such stress, did Baron de Sigognac not apply to some of his father’s former comrades in arms, or even to the King, who is the natural protector of the nobility? ”



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“Brave though a man may be, misfortune is apt to make him timid,” answered Isabella, “and courage is restrained by shyness. The Baron joined us because he hoped to find some favourable opportunity in Paris, though none did present itself; and in order not to be a burden upon us, he insisted on taking the place of one of our number who died on the road. The part being played masked, he thought it would not be derogatory in him to do so.”

“I do not claim to be a wizard,” said the Prince, with a kindly and mischievous smile, “but I fancy that the theatrical disguise may have been due to a little bit of a love affair. However, that is none of my business; I am too well acquainted with your high principles, and there is nothing alarming in the fact that a few discreet sighs have been breathed at your feet. Besides, I have not occupied the position of your father long enough to have the right to scold you.”

While he spoke, Isabella had turned upon him her great blue eyes, in which the purest innocence and the most absolute frankness were visible. The flush that had risen to her cheek at the mention of Sigognac’s name had faded away, and there was no trace of shame or embarrassment on her features. Her father’s glance,



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God's own glance would have seen nothing reprehensible in her heart.

The conversation had reached this point when Master Laurent's pupil was announced. He was the bearer of a favourable bulletin concerning Vallombreuse's state. The wounded man's condition was as good as could be expected, a turn for the better having followed upon the exhibition of the potion, and the physician now answered for the young Duke's life. The cure was merely a matter of time.

A few days later, Vallombreuse, propped up with pillows, and dressed in a shirt with broad Venetian point-lace collar, his hair parted and brushed, was sitting up in bed enjoying a visit from his faithful friend the Chevalier de Vidalinc, whom he had not hitherto been permitted to see. The Prince sat by the bed, looking with deep joy upon the face of his son, whose features were certainly wan and thin, but free from any alarming symptoms. His lips had regained their colour and life sparkled again in his eyes. Isabella was standing near the bed-head; the young Duke held her hand in his slender fingers, bluish white like those of patients who have been long kept from the sunshine and the open air. As he was not allowed to speak, save in

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monosyllables, he took this means of manifesting his affection to her who had been the involuntary cause of his wound, and of giving her to understand how fully he forgave her. The feelings of the brother had replaced those of the lover, and his illness, which had deadened the fires of his passion, had largely contributed to bring about this result. Isabella was now really to him the Countess de Lineuil, and not any longer an actress in Herod's company. He nodded in a friendly way to Vidalinc and gave him his hand for a moment, that being all the physician would permit for the time being.

In two or three weeks' time, Vallombreuse, whose strength was being built up by light food, was able to sit up for some hours at a time in an invalid's chair and to enjoy the open window through which entered the scented air of spring. Isabella often kept him company and read to him, which she did particularly well, her former profession having trained her to use her voice properly and to vary her intonation.

One day she had just finished a chapter and was about to begin another, the argument of which she had already read, when the Duke de Vallombreuse signed to her to put the book down, and said:—



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“ My dear sister, these adventures are most entertaining, and the author is undoubtedly one of the cleverest men at Court or in town. In every house his book is talked about, I know, yet I prefer your charming conversation to your reading of his work. I certainly did not anticipate I was to be so great a gainer, and the brother is better off than the lover ever was ; you are sweet to me now as you were hard before. I find in my tranquil affection for you a charm I had no conception of ; you teach me to know a side of the feminine character which was utterly unknown to me. Carried away by violent passion, pursuing the pleasure beauty promised me, becoming excited and irritated when I met with obstacles, I resembled the ferocious huntsman in the legend, whom nothing can stay ; the object of my love was to me but a prey, and the idea of resistance struck me as absurd. I used to shrug my shoulders when people spoke of virtue, and I may say without conceit to the only woman who proved really virtuous, that I had abundant reasons for my disbelief. My mother died when I was only three years old ; you had not yet been found, and I had not the faintest idea of the purity, tenderness, and delicacy of woman. I saw you, and an irresistible impulse,



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partly, no doubt, due to our unknown relationship, attracted me towards you, and for the first time I felt respect as well as passion. Your firmness distracted me, yet pleased me. The more you repelled me, the more I deemed you worthy of me, and even in my most violent moods I always respected you, for I felt the angel in the woman, and the ascendancy of celestial purity. Now I am happy, for I have just what I wanted without knowing it, — an affection free from all earthly alloy, unchangeable and eternal; at last I possess a soul."

"You do indeed possess it, dear brother," replied Isabella, "and happy am I to be able to say so. You have in me a devoted sister, who will love you twice as much to make up for lost time, especially if you master your passions, as you have promised our father to do, so that he will no longer be filled with dread on your account, and if you let the good in you come to the surface instead."

"How prettily you can preach," said Vallombreuse, smiling. "It is true that I am an awful monster, but I promise you I shall turn over a new leaf, if not through love for virtue, at least to avoid seeing my elder sister look glum at new escapades of mine.



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All the same, I fear I shall always typify folly, just as you will always be the incarnation of common-sense."

"If you go on paying me compliments like that," said Isabella, with a playful air of menace, "I shall take to the book again, and you will have to listen to the whole of the story the Moorish corsair was about to relate to the incomparable Princess Amenaïde, his captive, as she sat upon cushions of gold brocade in the cabin of his galley."

"I do not deserve to be punished so severely; and even at the risk of passing for a chatterer I am resolved to talk, for that confounded physician has too long set the seal of silence upon my lips and made me look like a statue of Harpocrates."

"But I am afraid you will tire yourself; your wound is scarcely cicatrised. Master Laurent particularly recommended that I should read to you in order to rest your lungs while listening to me."

"Master Laurent talks nonsense, and wants to make himself out a greater man than he is. My lungs inhale and exhale the air as easily as they ever did. I feel perfectly well, and I have a great mind to go off for a ride through the forest."



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“Talking would be better than that; it is less dangerous, I am sure.”

“I shall soon be on my feet again, dear sister, and then I shall introduce you into the society which befits your rank, and in which your perfect beauty will unfailingly bring endless adorers to your feet, from among whom the Countess de Lineuil will be able to select a husband.”

“I have no desire to wed, and I beg you will not suppose that this is merely a way of speaking and that I should be sorry to have people act upon it. I have bestowed my hand upon a suitor so often in plays that I am in no hurry to do so in real life. I ask for no pleasanter fate than remaining with the Prince and you.”

“A father and a brother are not everything, even in the case of ladies who care no whit for the world. Such affection does not fully satisfy the heart.”

“It will satisfy mine, at all events, and the day it ceases to do so, I shall enter a convent.”

“That would be carrying austerity rather too far. Does not the Chevalier de Vidalinc, for instance, strike you as likely to make an excellent husband?”

“Assuredly, and the woman he weds may count



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herself fortunate; but no matter how charming he may be, I shall never be his wife."

"Vidalinc is rather ruddy, and it may be that like our late King Louis, thirteenth of the name, you dislike that sort of complexion and that colour of hair, which, nevertheless, is highly esteemed by painters. But let us drop Vidalinc. What think you of the Marquis de l'Estang, who came to see me the other day, and who never once took his eyes from you the whole time his visit lasted? He was so dazzled by your grace, so taken aback by your incomparable beauty, that he boggled his compliments and stammered and stuttered. Apart from that shyness of his, which you ought readily to forgive, since you were the cause of it, he is an accomplished cavalier, handsome, young, high-born, and very wealthy. He would be an excellent match for you."

"Since I have the honour of belonging to your illustrious family," returned Isabella, somewhat annoyed by her brother's teasing, "over-much humility would be out of place, so I shall not say that I consider myself unworthy of making such a match, but if the Marquis de l'Estang were to ask my father for my hand, I would refuse him. I have already told you, brother,



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that I mean not to wed, as you very well know, though you will go on teasing me about it."

"How fiercely virginal you are, sister! Diana, herself, in her groves and dales of Hæmus was not more resolute than you. Yet, if we may believe the gossip-mongers of mythology, my lord Endymion found favour in her eyes. You fire up because I suggest, in the course of conversation, some suitable matches, but if you do not approve of them, we can easily find others."

"I do not fire up—but really you are talking a great deal too much for a sick man, and I shall get Master Laurent to scold you. You shall not have the chicken-wing for supper; there!"

"I am mute as mute can be, in that case," said Vallombreuse submissively, "but I warrant you I shall be the one to find a husband for you."

In order to punish her brother for his persistency, Isabella began the story of the Barbary corsair in a loud, vibrant voice that drowned his:—

"My father, the Duke de Fossombrone, was walking with my mother, one of the most beautiful women in the Duchy of Genoa, if indeed she were not the most beautiful, upon the shore of the Mediterranean,



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which was reached by steps leading down from the superb villa which he inhabited in summer, when Algerine pirates, concealed behind rocks, sprang upon him, overpowered him in spite of his desperate resistance, left him for dead where he lay, and carried off my mother, shrieking and struggling, to their boat, which pulled away at great speed, and rejoined their galley which was sheltered in a creek. Having been presented to the Dey, my mother took his fancy, and she became his favourite . . . ”

Vallombreuse here closed his eyes and pretended to fall asleep, for the purpose of spoiling Isabella's revenge. But his feigned slumber soon became real, and the young girl, seeing him sound asleep, withdrew on tiptoe.

Isabella felt troubled, in spite of herself, by the conversation that had taken place, and in which the Duke appeared to have manifested a certain malicious intention. She wondered whether Vallombreuse secretly bore a grudge against Sigognac, whose name he had never once spoken since the attack on the castle, and was trying to place an insurmountable obstacle between him and her by marrying her off, or whether he was trying to ascertain if her feelings had changed



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with her condition. Isabella knew not which of these alternatives might be the right one. The fact that she had turned out to be the young Duke's sister necessarily put an end to the rivalry between Sigognac and him, but on the other hand it was difficult to believe that the Duke, with his proud, haughty, and vindictive character, could have forgotten the shame of his first defeat, let alone of his second. Surely, though the positions were reversed, Vallombreuse must still bear hatred to Sigognac in his heart of hearts; and even supposing that he was noble-minded enough to forgive him, he could not be expected to be generous enough to feel affection for him and to welcome him into the family. There was evidently no hope of a reconciliation; and, besides, the Prince would never look kindly upon the man who had imperilled the Duke's life.

These thoughts saddened Isabella and she sought in vain to shake off her melancholy. As long as she had considered that her profession would prove a bar to Sigognac's success, she had put away all idea of ever being his wife; but now that an unexpected stroke of fate had loaded her with every good gift one may desire, she would have been delighted to reward with



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the gift of her hand the lover who had asked for it when she was poor and looked down upon. She thought it mean not to share her prosperity with him who had been her companion in poverty; but all she could do was to remain absolutely faithful to him, for she did not venture to speak on his behalf to the Prince or to Vallombreuse.

The young Duke was ere long well enough to take his meals with his father and sister. He behaved with respectful deference to the Prince, and with loving and delicate tenderness towards Isabella. He gave proof that, in spite of his apparent frivolities, he was much more cultured than would have been thought to be the case, in view of his fondness for women, duels, and all manner of dissipations. Isabella took a modest part in the conversation, and always spoke with such sense, cleverness, and timeliness, that the Prince was amazed, especially as the girl's tact led her to avoid any approach to preciosity and pedantry.

One day, after Vallombreuse had fully regained his strength, he proposed to his sister to ride in the park. The pair rode down a long avenue, the mighty trees of which formed a vault of verdure over their heads, which the rays of the sun could not penetrate. The



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Duke was as handsome as ever, Isabella looked lovely, and never did a more graceful couple ride side by side. The only difference was that the young fellow's face was bright, while the girl's was sad. At times Vallombreuse's sallies forced her to smile faintly, but she would straightway become melancholy again. Her brother, however, did not appear to notice her sorrow, and grew livelier every moment.

“What a delightful thing it is to be alive!” said he. “How few people realise the amount of pleasure to be derived from the simple act of breathing. Never have the trees seemed so green to me, the sky so blue, and the flowers so sweet. I feel as if I had been born yesterday and were beholding creation for the first time. When I reflect that I might have been lying under a marble tombstone instead of riding about with my sister, I want to shout aloud for the mere pleasure of the thing. My wound does not pain me in the slightest, and I do really think we may venture upon a short gallop home, where the Prince is wearying for our return.”

Notwithstanding Isabella's objections, for she was still fearful of Vallombreuse hurting himself, the latter spurred his steed and the two horses went off at score.



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When they reached the foot of the outer stairs, the young Duke said, as he lifted his sister from the saddle : —

“ Now I am grown up, and I shall be allowed to go out alone.”

“ What? do you want to leave us already, when you are scarcely cured, you naughty fellow? ”

“ Yes; I must be off on a trip that will take me away for a few days,” replied Vallombreuse lightly.

And the next morning, as he had announced, he started, after taking leave of the Prince, who made no objection to his going.

On leaving, he said to Isabella, in a mysterious tone : —

“ Good-bye for the present, little sister; you will have reason to be satisfied with me.”

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XIX

NETTLES AND COBWEBS

HEROD'S advice was wise, and Sigognac determined to follow it; besides, now that Isabella had turned out to be a great lady, there was no attraction for him in the company of the players. It was desirable to disappear for a season, to be lost to memory as to sight, until the resentment caused by Vallombreuse's probable death had cooled down. So after having bidden farewell, not without some emotion, to the worthy actors who had proved such true comrades, Sigognac rode away from Paris, bestriding a strong nag, and his pockets handsomely filled with pistoles, his share of the receipts. He travelled by easy stages towards his ruinous home, for after the storm a bird always returns to its nest, even though it be of twigs and old straw only. It was the one and only refuge left him, and in his despair he took a sort of pleasure in returning to the wretched castle of his fathers, which, perhaps, it would have been as well had



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he never left, for, indeed, his fortunes had not greatly improved, and his last adventure would certainly do him harm.

“It seems,” he said to himself as he rode on, “that I was predestined to die of starvation and ennui within my cracked walls and under that roof of mine which leaks like a sieve. No man can avoid his fate, and I shall dree my doom; I shall be the last of the Sigognacs.”

There is no necessity to describe in detail the trip itself, which lasted some three weeks and which no interesting incident varied. Suffice it to say that one fine evening Sigognac saw from afar the two turrets of his castle, lighted up by the setting sun and standing out bright against the purple background of the horizon. An effect of light caused them to look nearer than they really were, and the rays of the sun burned glowing red upon one of the few panes of glass on the façade, so that it looked like a huge carbuncle.

The Baron was strangely moved at the sight. Much as he had suffered within that ruinous castle, nevertheless he experienced, on returning to it, the same feeling that one experiences on the return of an old friend whose faults have been forgotten during his absence.



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It was in that place that he had spent his life in poverty, obscurity, and solitude, but not unmixed with certain delights, since youth can never be wholly unhappy, and even when most discouraged still owns dreams and hopes. The very habit of pain ends in procuring a certain charm, and one takes to regretting some sorrows more than joys.

Sigognac spurred up his horse and quickened its pace, so as to arrive before night fell. The red glow on the pane had gone out, for the sun had sunk lower, and only a narrow segment of its disk showed above the brown line of the heather against the heavens. The manor was but a gray spot that almost melted into the shadows around, but Sigognac was well acquainted with the road, and soon struck the way, unfrequented of yore and quite deserted now, that led to the castle. The greedy branches of the hedges lashed his boots, and at the sound of the horse's steps the frightened frogs hopped away through the grass wet with the evening dew. The faint, distant bark of a dog, hunting alone as if to distract itself, was audible in the deep silence of the countryside.

Sigognac pulled up to listen more attentively. He thought he recognised Miraut's cracked bark. Soon



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the sound drew nearer and changed to quick joyous yelps, broken by the speed of breathless running. Miraut had scented his master, and was hastening towards him as fast as his old legs could carry him. The Baron whistled in a peculiar way, and in a moment more the good old faithful hound broke impetuously through a hole in the hedge, yowling, sobbing, and uttering cries that were well-nigh human. Although breathless and panting, he sprang at the horse's head, tried to leap up on the saddle to reach his master, and exhibited the most extravagant marks of canine joy ever manifested by an animal of his race. Argus itself, when it recognised Ulysses in the house of Eumæus, was not as happy as was Miraut. Sigognac bent down and patted him on the head to calm his mad sympathy.

Satisfied with this welcome and resolving to be the bearer of the glad tidings to the dwellers in the castle, — that is, to Pierre, Bayard, and Beelzebub, — Miraut went off like a shot, and started barking so furiously in front of the old servant seated in the kitchen that he made him understand something out of the way was occurring.

“ Could it be the young master coming back ? ” said



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Peter rising and following Miraut, who was dragging at his garment. Night having fallen, Peter had lighted a few bits of resinous wood on the hearth, on which he was cooking his frugal supper, and their ruddy, smoky blaze suddenly showed him, at the end of the road, Sigognac on horseback.

“It is you for sure, my lord,” cried worthy Peter in joyous tones at the sight of his master. “Miraut had already told me in his own trusty language; for we are so lonely here that we all, animals and man, having no one else to talk to, have ended by understanding each other. All the same, as I had had no word from you that you were on your way back, I was afraid I might be mistaken. Well, expected or not, you are very welcome back to your own domain, and we shall do the best we can to prove it to you.”

“Yes, it is I indeed, dear Peter, and Miraut told you true. I am back, if not any richer, at least safe and sound. Come, you go first with the torch, and let us return to the house.”

With some difficulty Peter managed to throw open the leaves of the old gate, and Baron de Sigognac passed through under the arch fantastically illumined by the gleam of the torch. The three storks carved



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upon the coat of arms on the vaulting, seemed to come to life when the light fell upon them and to flap their wings by way of saluting the last representative of the family of which they had been the symbol for so many centuries. Then like a trumpet blast was heard a prolonged neighing; it was Bayard scenting his master from his stable, and straining his wheezy lungs to produce this sonorous call.

“Yes, yes, I hear you, my poor Bayard,” said Sigognac, springing from his horse and throwing the reins to Peter. “I am coming to say how do you do to you.”

He started towards the stable, but nearly tripped over a black thing that got between his legs, miauling, purring, and arching its back. It was Beelzebub expressing its happiness in the various ways nature has allowed to the feline race. Sigognac picked it up and lifted it to his face. The cat was happy as happy could be; its round eyes flashed with phosphorescent light, it quivered and trembled with excitement, it opened and closed its paws with their retractile claws, and fairly choked itself trying to purr louder and faster, while it stuck its nose, black and rough as a truffle, into Sigognac’s mustache with maddest affection.



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After having long caressed it, for he did not disdain these proofs of the love of his humble friends, the Baron put Beelzebub down gently, and then came Bayard's turn to be petted over and over again with stroking of the neck and patting of the quarters. The good old horse rested his head upon his master's shoulder, scraped the ground with his fore foot, and tried to curvet and prance. He courteously received the nag which was stabled alongside of him, for he felt sure of Sigognac's affection ; it may be also that he was not sorry to have company of his own kind, a thing he had not known for many a long day.

“ And now that I have returned the civilities of my animals,” said Sigognac to Peter, “ it strikes me that it would not be out of the way to pass into the kitchen and see what there is in your pantry. I made but a poor breakfast this morning, and I skipped the dinner, for I wanted to reach the end of my travels before night. I have somewhat broken away from austere habits in Paris, and I should not be sorry to sup, even if off a mere bone.”

“ There is some miassou left, a bit of bacon, and goat's-milk cheese. It is wild and rustic fare, that you may not fancy since you have tasted fine cookery, but



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if it does not tickle the palate, it at least keeps one from starving."

"And no man can ask more of food," replied Sigognac; "nor will you find me ungrateful, as you seem to fear, to the simple fare that nourished me in youth, and made me healthy, alert, and vigorous. So on with your miassou, your bacon and cheese, with as much style as if you were a majordomo bringing on a peacock with outspread tail upon a golden platter."

Thus reassured on the score of his cookery, Peter quickly laid the cover on the table where Sigognac had been in the habit of eating his frugal meals. He spread a cloth that was yellowish but clean, put a goblet on one side, and on the other an earthenware jug filled with ordinary and rather sharp wine, by way of symmetrically balancing the piece of miassou, and then stood behind his master like a butler in attendance upon a prince. In conformity with the old established custom, Miraut sat up on his right, and Beelzebub squatted on his left, watching Baron de Sigognac ecstatically, and following the trips his hand made from the plate to his mouth and from his mouth to the plate, in expectation of the bits of food he impartially threw to them.



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This curious picture was lighted by the splint of resinous wood which Peter had stuck inside the mantelpiece, on an iron holder, to prevent the smoke filling the room. The scene was so exactly like that described at the outset of this tale that the Baron, struck by it, fancied he must have dreamed, and that he had never left his home.

Time, which had flown so fast in Paris, seemed to have stood still in the castle of Sigognac. The Hours had fallen asleep and had not taken the trouble to overset their sand-glasses now filled with dust. Everything was in the same place. The spiders still slumbered in the corners of their gray hammocks, awaiting the coming of mythical flies; some of them had lost courage and had failed to repair their webs, not being in condition to extract silk from their bodies. From a coal on the white ashes on the hearth, which appeared not to have burned itself out since the Baron's departure, rose a slender wisp of smoke like that of a pipe nearly out. Only, in the court-yard the hemlock and the nettles had grown taller, the grass that encompassed the paving-stones was higher, and the branch of a tree that formerly barely reached the kitchen window now sent a leafy shoot into it through



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a broken pane. Otherwise there was no difference visible.

In spite of himself Sigognac again fell under the influence of his surroundings. His thoughts of olden days crowded back into his brain, and he sank into silent reveries respected by Peter and which neither Miraut nor Beelzebub ventured to disturb by unseasonable caresses. All that had happened seemed to him like adventures he had read in some book and which he dimly recollectcd. Captain Fracasse, already half effaced, showed in the distant past like a pale phantom that had come out of him and that was for ever separated from him. His fight with Vallombreuse recurred to his memory merely as a queer pantomime with which his will had nothing to do. None of the acts he had performed during that period of time seemed to be connected with him, and his return to the castle had broken the ties that bound them to his life. His love for Isabella alone had not departed ; he found it again strong in his heart, but rather in the form of an aspiration of the soul than of a real passion, for she who was the object of it could never be his. He understood that the wheels of his car of life, jolted for a moment into a different rut, had returned to the one



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in which they had always run, and he quietly resigned himself to the fact. The only thing he blamed himself for was having momentarily indulged in hopes and illusions. But it serves unfortunates right ! Why the devil should they want to be happy ?

He managed, however, to shake off this torpor, and as he caught sight of timid questionings in Peter's glance, he briefly narrated to the worthy fellow the chief facts in his history which might interest him. When the old chap heard the account of his pupil's two duels with Vallombreuse, he was fairly radiant with delight at having such a disciple, and with a stick in his hand he repeated against the wall the thrusts that Sigognac described.

“Alas ! my dear Peter,” said the Baron with a sigh, “you taught me too well those secrets of fencing which no one knows as you do. That victory has been my destruction and has sent me back into my poor gloomy manor for many a long day, if not for ever. My particular ill fortune consists in the fact that triumph casts me down and ruins my chances instead of improving them. It would have been better for me to have been wounded, or even killed, in that unhappy affair.”



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“A Sigognac cannot be beaten,” said the old servant epigrammatically. “No matter what may happen, I am glad you killed that Vallombreuse. I am sure you did it according to rule, and there is no more to be said; for what possible objection can a man raise if he is laid out dead with a fine thrust when he is himself on his guard?”

“None, of course,” returned Sigognac, smiling at the fencing master’s philosophy. “But I feel somewhat weary; light my lamp and show me to my room.”

Peter obeyed, and the Baron, preceded by his dog and his cat, slowly ascended the old staircase; the frescoes were dulled by time and the colouring had lost its original hues. The Hercules in their cases were paler than ever, and appeared to be striving hard to upbear the sham cornice, the weight of which seemed to overpower them. Their worn muscles swelled desperately, but they had been unable to prevent pieces of plaster falling from the walls. The Roman emperors were not in much better plight, and though as they stood in their niches they affected to put on braggart and victorious airs, they had lost crown or sceptre or purple. The painted trellis-work on the vaulting had



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broken away in many a spot, and the winter rains, making their way in through the cracks, had laid out new Americas alongside the old continents and isles already depicted there.

The ruinous condition of his abode struck Sigognac painfully, although he had paid no particular attention to it before he had left his home, and it made him sad and thoughtful. It was to him the outward and visible sign of the decadence of his family, and he said to himself: —

“ If this roof were capable of feeling any pity for the family it has so long sheltered, it ought to fall down and crush me on the spot.”

On reaching the door of the apartments, he took the lamp from Peter’s hand, thanked him, and dismissed him, for he desired to conceal his feelings from him. He then slowly traversed the room where, a few months before, the players had sat down to supper. The remembrance of that pleasant occasion made it look all the more gloomy now; the silence, which had been broken for a moment, had settled down upon it more gloomy, more intense, and more dreadful than ever. The sound of a rat gnawing the wood-work sounded strangely loud in the tomb-like hall. The portraits,



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lighted by the faint gleams of the lamp, and leaning against their faded gilt frames as if these were balconies, had a disquieting look ; they seemed to be endeavouring to break away from their shadowy backgrounds and to step down to welcome their unfortunate descendant. These ancient effigies were filled with spectral life ; their painted lips were moving and whispering words audible to the soul but unheard by the ear ; their gaze was turned sadly to the ceiling ; the damp condensed in great drops upon their painted cheeks and shone in the light like tears. There could be no doubt that the spirits of his ancestors were lingering round those representations of the terrestrial shapes they had formerly animated, and Sigognac was aware of their invisible presence in the secret horror of the semi-obscurity. Every one of these figures tricked out in farthingales or breastplates looked desolate and forlorn. One portrait alone, the last of the series, that of Sigognac's mother, appeared to smile. The light happened to fall exactly upon it, and whether it was that the painting was more recent and the work of a cleverer hand, or that the soul had actually returned to revivify the simulacrum for an instant, the portrait wore an air of assured and joyous tenderness which surprised Sigognac,



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and which he took for a favourable omen, the expression of the face having hitherto always struck him as melancholy.

He at last entered his own room, and put the lamp down upon the little table on which still lay the volume of Ronsard that he was busy reading when the players knocked by night at the gates of his castle. The paper, covered with corrections,—it was the rough draft of an unfinished sonnet,—was still in the same place. The bed, which had not been made up, still bore the imprint of the forms that had last rested upon it. Isabella had slept there, and her lovely head had rested on the pillow, the confidant of 'so many dreams.

As this thought occurred to Sigognac, he felt his heart exquisitely tortured by a delicious pain, if it be permissible to collocate words naturally contrary in meaning. His imagination retraced vividly to him the girl's lovely charms, while his reason, with importunate, gruesome voice, repeated that Isabella was for ever lost to him. Yet his amorous fancy seemed to show him her sweet and lovely face peeping out between the half-parted curtains like the face of a chaste spouse awaiting her husband's return.



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To rid himself of these visions that told on his fortitude, he undressed and got into bed, kissing the place where Isabella had lain; nevertheless, fatigued though he was, sleep was tardy in coming to him, and for more than an hour his glance wandered round the ruinous room, now following a strange effect of the moonlight upon the dimmed window-panes, now fixed intently upon the duck-hunter among the blue and yellow trees of the forest represented on the tapestry.

But if the master was awake, the animal was asleep; Beelzebub, curled up in a ball at Sigognac's feet, was snoring as did Mahomet's cat upon the prophet's sleeve. The creature's deep peace at last communicated itself to the man, and the young Baron departed into the land of dreams.

When the dawn came, Sigognac felt even more painfully than the night before the state of dilapidation into which his place had fallen; for daylight has no pity for ruins and old things; it cruelly brings out their poverty, their wrinkles, their spots, and discolouration, the dust and the mould that lie upon them. Night is more kindly; it softens everything with its friendly shades, and with the fold of its robe wipes away all the



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tears of things. The rooms that he remembered so large, looked small now, and he was amazed to have thought of them as vast; but ere long he fitted himself again to the proportions of his residence, and took up his old life as he might have put on an old coat laid aside for a time in favour of a new one. He felt himself at his ease in the worn-out garment, every crease in which was the result of a habit.

His days were spent in the following manner: he first offered up a short prayer in the ruined chapel where reposed his ancestors, cleared away the brambles from some broken tomb, ate his frugal meal, fenced with Peter, rode out on Bayard, or on the nag, which he had kept, returned home after a long excursion, silent and dull as of yore, supped with Miraut and Beelzebub on either side of him, and went to bed, where, to court sleep, he glanced over one of the odd volumes, read time and time again, that formed his library, the prey of the hungry rats. Nothing remained, it will be seen, of the dashing Captain Fracasse, the bold rival of the Duke de Vallombreuse. Sigognac was truly once more the castellan of the Tower of Poverty.

One day he went down to the garden where he had taken the two young actresses. It was more uncul-



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tivated, wilder, and fuller of weeds than ever ; yet the eglantine that had provided a couple of blooms — a rose for Isabella and a bud for Serafina, so that it should not be said these two ladies had left a flower-garden without bearing away a flower or two — the eglantine appeared to have prided itself, on this occasion as on the former one, on being in bloom ; on the same branch had opened two lovely little roses, with delicate petals unfolded in the morning light and retaining in their hearts two or three pearly dew-drops.

Sigognac felt deeply moved at the sight, which awakened the remembrance of the words Isabella had spoken : “ During the walk in your garden, when you were parting the brambles in my way, you picked for me a little wild rose, the only gift in your power. I let fall a tear upon it before putting it in my bosom, and I silently gave you my heart in exchange.”

He plucked the rose, breathed in its scent lovingly, and kissed its petals, imagining them the lips of his love, lips no less soft, rosy, and perfumed. Since he had parted from Isabella his thoughts dwelt unceasingly upon her, and he had come to understand how incomplete his life was without her. At first, the bewilderment caused by the crowding together of so many



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adventures, the amazement due to the sudden changes of fortune he had beheld, together with the inevitable distractions consequent on a long trip, had prevented his understanding the real condition of his own heart. But now that he was plunged once more into solitude, quiet, and silence, it was Isabella who figured in all his thoughts and whose image filled his brain and his heart. The very memory of Yolande had vanished as does the lightest of vapours. He did not even ask himself whether he had ever really loved that proud beauty; he had completely forgotten her. And when for the hundredth time he had reckoned up all the obstacles between himself and his happiness, he would wind up with, "Yet Isabella loves me."

Two or three months passed away in this fashion, when one day, Sigognac being in his room putting the final touch on a sonnet in praise of his lady-love, Peter entered and informed his master that there was a gentleman who wished to speak to him.

"A gentleman who wishes to speak to me!" said Sigognac. "You are mistaken. No one has anything to say to me. However, in view of the rarity of the occurrence, show up this strange mortal. What is his name?"



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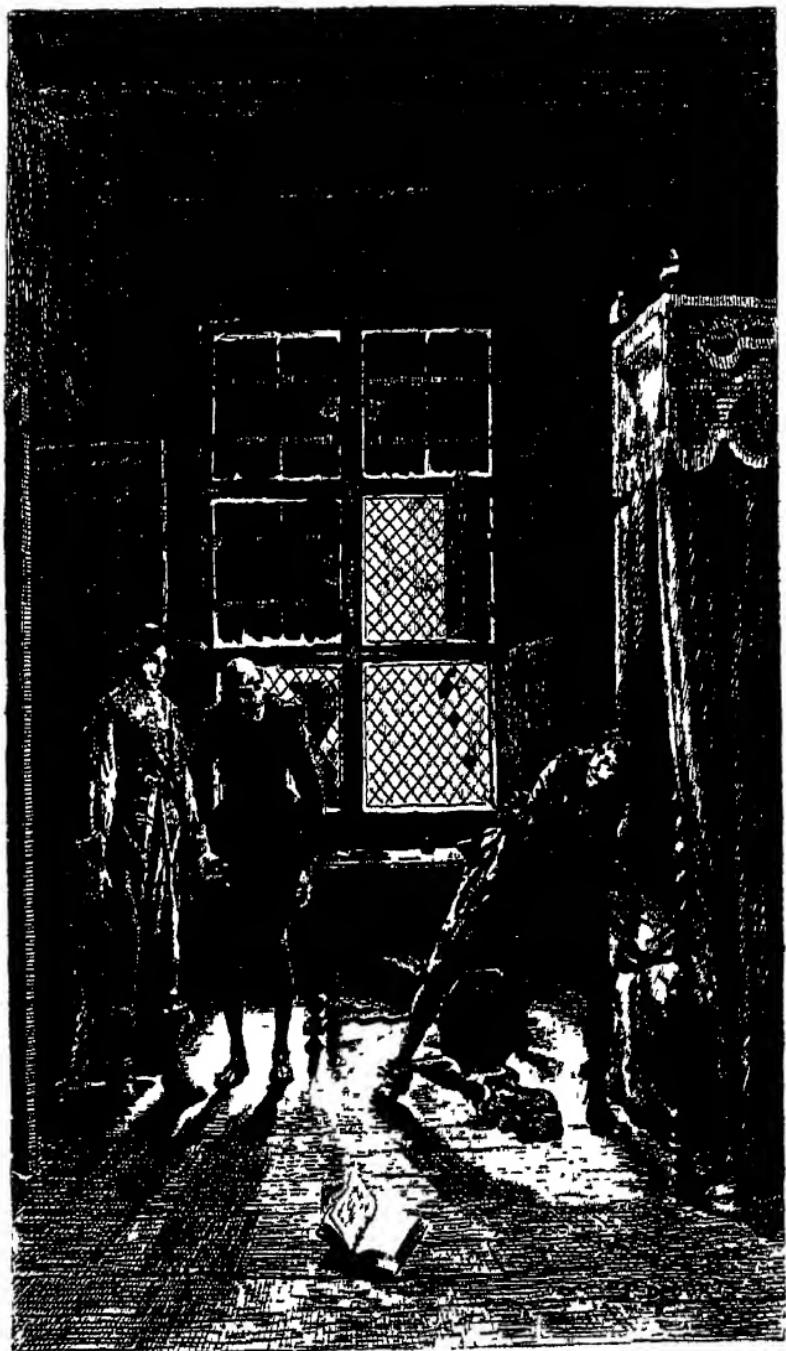
“He refused to give it, saying that it would not convey any information to you,” returned Peter as he threw open both leaves of the door.

On the threshold appeared a handsome young fellow, wearing an elegant riding-dress of nut-brown cloth, trimmed with green, gray felt boots with silver spurs, and in his hand a broad-brimmed beaver with long green feather, so that his proud, delicate, and lovely features, which many a woman might well have envied, showed plainly with their lines and contours that might have been those of a Greek statue.

This accomplished cavalier evidently made no pleasant impression upon Sigognac, who turned slightly pale, sprang to his sword hanging at his bedhead, drew it, and fell on guard.

“By Jove! my lord Duke, I fancied I had quite done for you. Is it you or your shade whom I behold?”

“It is I myself, Hannibal de Vallombreuse, in flesh and blood,” replied the young Duke, “and very far from dead. But pray put up your sword without further ado. We have fought twice already, and you know the old saying that twice is pleasant, but thrice is a bore. I do not come to you as a foe. If I have reason to reproach myself with certain peccadilloes,



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you have taken your revenge very thoroughly, and consequently we are quits. By way of proving that my intentions are good, here is a commission from His Majesty, who bestows a regiment upon you, my father and I having reminded the King of the services rendered by the Sigognacs to his ancestors. I wished to bring it to you myself, as a pleasant piece of news. And now that I am your guest, please have killed and spitted any creature you like, but for Heaven's sake, give me something to eat. The inns on the road are most wretched, and my equipages are stuck in the sand at some distance from here, with all the victuals I brought along."

"I greatly fear, my lord Duke," returned Sigognac, with playful courtesy, "that the dinner I shall set before you may appear to be a piece of revenge on my part, but I beg you will not attribute to rancour the poor fare you will have to put up with. Your frank and cordial ways touch me deeply; henceforth you have no more devoted friend than I, and although you scarcely need my services, you may command me in all things. Here, Peter, get hold of some eggs, chickens, and meat, and try to regale his lordship to the best of your ability, for he is fairly starving and is not used to it as we are."

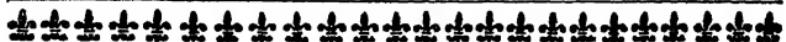


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Peter provided himself with a number of the pistoles sent him by his master, and which he had never yet spent, jumped on the nag, and galloped off to the nearest village in quest of provisions. He managed to get hold of a few chickens, a ham, a flagon of old wine, and a pasty of ducks' livers, a delicacy worthy of figuring upon the table of a prelate or a prince, which he discovered in the priest's house, though he had some difficulty in persuading the ecclesiastic to let him have it.

He was back within an hour, intrusted the turning of the spit to a tall, pale, ragged wench he had met on the road and sent on to the castle, and himself set the table in the portrait gallery, selecting from the earthenware on the dressers the plates and dishes that were merely chipped or cracked. As for silver plate, it was needless to think of it, for the last piece of it had long since been sent to the melting-pot. Everything being ready, he entered and announced to his master that the dinner was served.

Vallombreuse and Sigognac sat down opposite each other on the least rickety of the half-dozen chairs, and the young Duke, who was greatly tickled by the novelty of the situation, fell to upon the provisions



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collected with such difficulty by Peter, displaying an amusingly keen appetite. His handsome white teeth, after having disposed of a whole chicken, that, it is true, seemed to have wasted away in life, were gayly biting into a rosy slice of Bayonne ham, making no bones of it, as the saying is. He declared the ducks' livers were the most delicate, exquisite, and ambrosial of food, and the ordinary goat's-cheese, streaked and spotted with green, an excellent whetter of thirst. He praised the wine also, which was old and choice, and the rich colour of which glowed ruddy in the old Venetian wine-glasses. He was in such high good-humour that he nearly burst out laughing once, on beholding Peter's bewildered look when the latter heard his master address his very living guest as the Duke de Vallombreuse, whom he, Peter, supposed to be dead and gone. Sigognac himself, while doing his best to match his guest's ease of manner, could not help feeling wonderment at seeing seated familiarly at his own table the proud and dandified young nobleman, but recently his rival in love, whom twice he had had at his mercy, and who more than once had attempted to have him put out of the way by hired ruffians.

The Duke perceived what was in Sigognac's mind



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without the latter having to express himself in words, and when the old servant had withdrawn, first placing on the table a flagon of choice wine and two smaller glasses, intended to allow of the more delicate enjoyment of the precious beverage, the Duke twisted his slight mustache and said to the Baron in a frank and friendly way : —

“ I can plainly see, my dear Sigognac, in spite of all your politeness, that my coming here strikes you as strange and sudden. I know you are saying to yourself: ‘ How comes it that Vallombreuse, so haughty, arrogant, and imperious, has turned from the tiger he was into a lamb that a shepherd lass might lead with a ribbon ? ’ Well, during the six weeks I spent on the broad of my back in bed, I had time to turn some things over in my mind, as the bravest of men may well do when he finds himself face to face with eternity ; for death itself is nothing to us aristocrats, who lay down our lives with a grace the middle classes will never be able to imitate. I felt how empty were many of the things I had believed in, and I made up my mind that if I recovered, I would change my way of life. As the love I felt for Isabella was transformed into a pure and holy friendship, there was no reason why I



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should hate you. You were no longer my rival, and a brother cannot be jealous of his sister's lover. I recognised and was grateful to you for the respectful affection you had shown her while she was still in a condition of life that admits of liberties being taken with a woman. You had been the first to divine what a beautiful soul she concealed under the dress of the actress. While she was still poor, you had offered her a nobleman's most precious possession, the name of your ancestors. She is therefore yours, now that she is of illustrious birth and wealthy, for Isabella's lover must necessarily be the Countess de Lineuil's husband."

"But," returned Sigognac, "she persistently refused to marry me when it was plain that I was absolutely disinterested."

"That was through excess of delicacy, through angelic sensitiveness and a desire to sacrifice herself to your interests. She feared to spoil your chances and to hurt your fortunes, but the fact that she has now been recognised as my father's daughter has changed matters."

"Yes, I shall now be the obstacle to her success. And therefore I have no right to be less self-sacrificing than she was."



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“ Do you still love my sister ? ” asked the Duke gravely. “ As her brother, I have the right to ask.”

“ I love her with my whole heart, soul, and life,” answered Sigognac. “ I love her more than any man ever loved woman on this earth of ours, where naught is perfect, save Isabella alone.”

“ In that case, Baron de Sigognac, Captain of the Musketeers, and soon to be the Governor of a province, have your horse saddled and come with me to Vallombreuse, that I may formally present you to the Prince my father and to the Countess de Lineuil my sister. Isabella has refused the hand of the Chevalier de Vidalinc and that of the Marquis de l’Estang, both handsome young fellows, i’ faith ; but I fancy she will need no great urging to accept the Baron de Sigognac.”

The next morning saw the Duke and the Baron riding side by side on the road to Paris.

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XX

CHIQUITA CONFESSES HER LOVE

A DENSE crowd filled the Place de Grève, although the hour shown on the dial of the Hôtel de Ville clock was still early. Domenico Boccadoro's great roof showed purplish gray against the milky-white sky. The cold shadows it cast stretched out to the centre of the square, and fell upon a grim scaffolding painted blood-red that rose a foot or two above the level of the lower story. From the windows of the neighbouring houses people every now and then put out their heads and drew them in again, on seeing that the show had not yet begun. There was even an old woman who looked out of a dormer-window of the turret at the corner of the square, from which, so tradition says, Queen Marguerite watched the execution of La Môle and Coonnas. The change from a lovely queen to a hideous old hag was not a pleasant one. On the stone cross erected on the edge



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of the slope leading down to the Seine, was perched a child who had climbed up there with difficulty, his arms passed over the cross-bar, his legs and knees gripping the shaft, in an attitude as painful as that of the penitent thief, but which he would not have exchanged for the best cake or apple dumpling in the world. From his coign of vantage, he could see perfectly the interesting details of the scaffold, the wheel on which the convicted criminal was to be broken, the ropes with which he was to be bound, the iron bar used in breaking the bones, all of which things were worthy of being noted.

Nevertheless, had any one of the spectators bethought himself of examining the child on his perch more attentively, he would have observed that his features expressed a very different sentiment than that of vulgar curiosity. It was not the horrid attraction of an execution that had drawn thither the dark-complexioned youngster, with his shining teeth and his long black hair, who was clinging desperately with his sun-brown'd hands to the stone cross-piece. Indeed his delicate features suggested that his sex was not that indicated by his garments. No one, however, bestowed a glance upon him, for every face was instinctively turned

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towards the scaffold or towards the quay by which the condemned man was to come.

Among the groups were some faces with which the reader is acquainted. A red nose and a wan face marked Malartic, and just enough of Jacquemin Lampourde's aquiline profile showed above the folds of his cloak, draped in Spanish fashion over his shoulder, to enable one to recognise him unmistakably. And although he wore his hat pulled well down over his face, in order to hide the absence of the ear that Piedgris' bullet had cut off, it was easy to know the tall rascal seated on a post for Bringuenarilles, smoking a long Dutch pipe to while away the time. Piedgris himself was chatting with Tordgueule, and on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville were rambling about in peripatetic fashion a number of the frequenters of the Crown and Radish discoursing of many things. The Place de Grève, where they are all bound to end their lives sooner or later, has a singular fascination for murderers, ruffians, and thieves. Instead of repelling, the grim spot attracts them ; they keep turning round and round its circumference in circles wide at first but growing continually smaller, until at last they fall within it. They like to look at the gibbet on which they will be



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hanged; they gaze attentively at its horrible outlines, and the grimaces of the sufferers teach them to become familiar with death, which is precisely the opposite effect to that justice aims at, namely, to terrify rascals by the sight of torture.

Another cause, also, of the affluence of that class of spectators on days when executions take place is that the protagonist of the tragedy is almost always a relative, an acquaintance, or an accomplice. So men go to see their cousin hanged, their bosom friend broken on the wheel, the good fellow whose counterfeit coin they passed boiled in oil. It would be uncivil to keep away from the entertainment. The sufferer, too, finds it pleasant to have around the scaffold an audience composed of friendly faces; it revives and sustains his resolution; a man does not want to show cowardice in the presence of appreciators of true merit, and pride enables him to bear up under pain. Many a one, who amid such surroundings, dies like a Roman, would be more than womanish were he put to death in a cellar.

Seven o'clock struck. The execution was to take place at eight. So Jacquemin Lampourde, on hearing the stroke of the bell, said to Malartic:—

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“ Did I not tell you we had time for another bottle ? You are always so nervous and impatient. What do you say to going back to the Crown and Radish ? I hate to stand about first on one leg and then on the other, and to dance attendance on a show. Come now, is it worth waiting so long to see a poor devil broken on the wheel ? It is such a tasteless, commonplace, and vulgar spectacle. Now if it were a fine quartering by four horses each ridden by an official of the provost corps, or a matter of tearing the flesh away with red-hot pincers, or the pouring in of boiling pitch or molten lead, something, in a word, ingeniously torturing or ferociously painful, that would do honour to the inventiveness of the judge or the skill of the executioner, then I should not object,—I should remain for the love of the art; but honestly it is not worth doing so for so small a matter.”

“ I do not think you do justice to the wheel,” replied Malartic gravely, as he rubbed his nose, that was redder than ever. “ The wheel has its good points.”

“ There is no accounting for tastes. Every one is carried away by his particular fancy, as a very famous Latin author says, though what his name was I have forgotten, for it is only the names of great warriors



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that my memory retains easily. You like the wheel; very well, I shall not quarrel with you on the subject, and I shall stay with you until the end. But you must acknowledge that to behead a man with a damascened blade, with a hollow filled with quicksilver down the upper part, in order to weight it, requires a quick eye, strength, and dexterity, and forms a spectacle at once noble and attractive."

"I grant all that, but it is too soon over; it is a mere flash. Besides, beheading is reserved for the nobility; the block is one of their privileges. Of the vulgar tortures, the wheel strikes me as superior to commonplace hanging, which at best is fit for second-rate malefactors only. Now Agostino is more than a mere thief; he deserves something better than the rope, and the law has shown him no more than the attention which is his due."

"You have always had a weakness for Agostino, no doubt on account of Chiquita, whose strangeness has allured you. I do not share your admiration of that bandit, who is better fitted to ply his trade on highways and in mountain passes, like a *salteador*, than to operate with the refinement needed in a civilised city. He is ignorant of the fine points of the art; he is crabbed,

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rough, and countrified in his methods. To cut the Gordian knot is not to undo it, no matter what Alexander may have affirmed. Then he does not make use of the sword, and therein he lacks nobility."

"Agostino's specialty is the navaja, the weapon of his own country; and he has not, like ourselves, trod the floor of fencing-rooms for years. His own style, however, is startling, bold, and original; the way he hurls his knife unites the pleasure of ballistics and the discreet certainty of cold steel. He can kill his man at twenty paces and noiselessly. I must say I deeply regret that his career should be cut short so soon; he was getting along famously, and was bold as a lion."

"For my part," answered Jacquemin Lampourde, "I hold by the academic methods; for, if you let form go, you let everything go. Every time I have to attack a man, I touch him on the shoulder and give him time to fall on guard; then if he wants to defend himself he can do so. The affair becomes a duel; it is not a murder. I am a ruffian, not an assassin. It is true that my thorough knowledge of fencing gives me an advantage, and that I am almost infallible when sword in hand, but it is not cheating to be an expert at the game. I pick up the purse, watch, jewels, and



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cloak of the dear departed ; any one else would do the same ; and after all, it is reasonable that I should benefit, since I have had to do the job. No matter what you may say, that knife business is repellent to me ; it may do very well in the country and with people of low degree."

" You are a stickler for principle, Jacquemin Lam-pourde, as every one knows, and not for worlds would you give it up. All the same, a little fancy work is not out of the way in art."

" I am willing to allow of learned, complex, refined fancy work ; but mad and ferocious brutality disgusts me. Besides, Agostino gets drunk with blood, and when the fit is on him he strikes right and left. That is a weak point ; when a man drinks the heady wine of murder, he needs a strong head. Now take the case of that house into which he made his way recently to steal money. He killed the husband, who had awakened, and the woman, who was asleep. That was a superfluous murder, very ungallant and overstepping the bounds of cruelty. A woman should never be killed unless she screams, and even then it is better to gag her, for if one happens to be caught, the killing affects the judges and the public and makes a man look like a monster."

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“ You speak like Saint John Chrysostom,” replied Malartic, “ and in so peremptory and authoritative a manner that I have nothing to urge. Only, what is to become of poor Chiquita ? ”

Jacquemin Lampourde and Malartic were thus conversing when a coach coming from the quay drove into the square and caused the crowd to sway back and forth. The horses reared and pawed the ground without being able to proceed, and their hoofs sometimes lighted upon wooden clogs, resulting in an angry interchange of remarks between the footmen and the rabble.

The pedestrians who were thus trodden on would gladly have attacked the coach, had not the ducal arms emblazoned on the panels of the doors inspired them with a certain amount of terror, although they were not the sort to respect any one. The crowd soon became so dense that the coach was compelled to pull up in the centre of the square, and from a distance the coachman, motionless on his box, looked as if he were sitting on the heads of the people. The only way to force a passage through would have been to drive over a large number of the assembled rascals, and as these rascals felt at home on the Place de Grève, they might not have been inclined to submit.



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“The rabble is waiting for an execution, and it will not give us room before the poor beggar has been despatched,” said a very handsomely dressed young gentleman to his friend, very distinguished-looking also, but dressed more plainly, who sat beside him in the carriage. “The devil take the fool who selects the very moment when we want to cross the Place de Grève to be broken on the wheel! Why could he not wait until to-morrow?”

“I have no doubt,” replied the other, “that he would gladly do so, and that he is even more disgusted with the business than we are.”

“The best thing we can do, my dear Sigognac, is to make up our minds to look the other way if the sight proves disgusting, though it is no easy matter to do so, when something terrible is being enacted near one. You may remember that Saint Augustine, though he had made up his mind to keep his eyes closed in the circus, opened them on hearing the shout of the rabble.”

“In any case, we shall not have long to wait,” answered Sigognac. “See yonder, Vallombreuse; the crowd is opening out to let the convict cart pass in.”

And indeed a cart, drawn by a sorry horse fit for the

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knacker's only, was coming along, surrounded by a number of guards on horseback, rattling like old iron and pushing through the knots of sightseers, on its way to the scaffold. On a plank placed athwart the side-boards of the cart sat Agostino, by the side of a white-bearded Capuchin friar, who held to his lips a brass crucifix polished by the kisses of dying men in sound health. The bandit's hair was tied round with a handkerchief, the knotted ends of which hung down the nape of his neck. His dress consisted of a coarse linen shirt and a pair of old serge breeches ; he was dressed for the scaffold, and that is a scanty dress. The executioner, in virtue of his privileges, had already possessed himself of the convict's garments, leaving him only these rags, which were enough for him to die in. A number of cords, the ends of which were held by the executioner, placed at the back of the cart, so as not to be seen by the condemned man, held Agostino fast, though apparently he was free. One of the executioner's aids, sitting sideways on one of the shafts of the cart, held the reins and lashed the poor brute of a horse.

“Why,” said Sigognac in the coach, “that is the very bandit who once held me up with his company of



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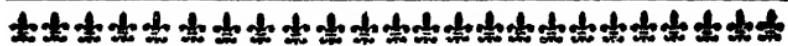
mannikins on the high-road. I told you the story when, in the course of our trip, we passed the spot where the affair occurred."

"I remember," answered Vallombreuse, "and I laughed heartily at it. It would seem, however, that the rascal has since then indulged in more serious business. Ambition has been the death of him. He looks game enough, all the same."

Agostino, who looked a little pale under the sun-burn on his face, was gazing anxiously at the crowd, seemingly in search of some one. As he passed by the stone cross, he caught sight of the child mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, who was perched upon it, and had not left his place.

At the sight a flash of joy gleamed in his eyes, and a faint smile flitted over his lips. He nodded very slightly, by way of farewell and legacy at one and the same time, and muttered, "Chiquita!"

"What is the name you have just uttered, my son?" said the Capuchin, waving his crucifix. "It sounds like a woman's name,—a gipsy no doubt, or an abandoned girl. Turn your thoughts upon your salvation rather; you are standing on the brink of eternity."



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“I will, Father, for although my hair is black and your beard is white, you are younger than I : every turn of the wheels in the direction of that scaffold makes me ten years older.”

“That fellow Agostino, a country brigand who might well feel timid at having to die in presence of Parisians, behaves well,” said Jacquemin Lampourde, who had made his way close to the scaffold by elbowing out of his way the idlers and the gossips. “He is not very pale and has not already, as too many in like case, the cadaverous look of one dead. His head is firm ; he holds it well up, and it is a sign of courage in him that he has looked straight at the scaffold. Unless my experience plays me false, he will die decently and gamely, without groaning, struggling, or begging to be allowed to confess in order to gain time.”

“There is no fear of his doing that,” said Malartic ! “When he was being tortured he stood having eight wedges driven in, rather than open his lips to betray a single one of his comrades.”

During this short dialogue, the cart had reached the foot of the scaffold, and Agostino slowly ascended the steps, preceded by the aid, supported by the friar, and followed by the executioner. In less than a minute



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he was stretched out and fast bound on the wheel by the executioner's assistants. The executioner himself, having first thrown off his red cloak with the white embroidered ladder on the shoulder, had rolled up his sleeve in order to give his arm more freedom and play, and was bending down to pick up the fatal bar.

This was the crucial moment. The spectators were breathless with eager curiosity ; Lampourde and Malarthic had turned grave ; Briguenarilles himself had ceased to smoke and had removed his pipe from his lips ; Tordgueule, feeling that a like fate was awaiting him, looked thoughtful and sad. Suddenly there was a movement among the crowd ; the child perched on the cross had slid down, and worming his way through the knots of spectators like an eel, had reached the scaffold and sprung up the steps at a bound. The executioner, who was in the act of raising his bar, was so amazed at the sight of the pale face, with the glittering, resolute eyes, that he stopped in spite of himself and stayed the blow about to fall.

“Get out of this, you young imp,” he cried, “or I'll smash your head with my bar.”

Chiquita paid no heed to him ; little she recked whether she were killed or not. Bending over Agos-

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tino, she kissed him on the forehead, said, “I love you !” and, swifter than the lightning’s flash, drove into his heart the navaja she had taken back from Isabella. The blow was dealt with so firm a hand that death was almost instantaneous, and Agostino scarcely had time to say, “Thanks !”

“— *Cuando esta vivora pica,
No hay remedio en la botica,*”

muttered the child with a burst of mad, wild laughter, as she sprang down from the scaffold, on which the executioner, astounded at what had happened, was putting down his now useless iron bar, not knowing whether he ought to break the bones of a dead body.

“Well done ! Chiquita, well done !” Malartic could not help calling out, for he had recognised her in her boy’s dress.

Lampourde, Bringuenarilles, Piedgris, Tordgueule, and the boon companions of the Crown and Radish, delighted with the performance, formed a compact line in order to prevent the soldiers giving chase to Chiquita. The squabbling and fighting due to this systematic obstruction enabled the child to reach Vallombreuse’s coach, pulled up at the corner of the square. She



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jumped on the step, and clinging to the door, recognised Sigognac and said to him, gasping and breathless : —

“ I saved Isabella ; save me now ! ”

Vallombreuse, who had been deeply interested in the strange scene, shouted to the coachman : —

“ Drive on at full speed, and over the rabble if need be ! ”

But there was no need to do so, for the crowd eagerly made way for the carriage and immediately closed up again to stay the not too vigorous pursuit by the officers of justice. In a few minutes the coach reached the gate Saint-Antoine, and as it was impossible that the report of the affair, which had but just taken place, should have already reached that part of the city, Vallombreuse ordered the coachman to drive less fast, especially as the great pace at which they had been travelling might very easily have awakened suspicion. Once they had got beyond the suburb, he made Chiquita get inside the carriage. Without a word, the girl sat down on a cushion in front of Sigognac. Though she was apparently calm, she was in reality terribly over-excited ; her features were unmoved, but her cheeks, usually so wan, were empurpled and caused her great staring eyes to shine in an unnatural manner.



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Chiquita was transformed in some sort; the violent effort she had made had turned the child into a young woman. The knife she had driven into Agostino's heart had at the same time plunged into her own; her love had awakened with the stroke, and the strange, almost sexless creature, half child, half will o' the wisp, she had been until then, had ceased to exist. Henceforth she was a woman, and the love thus suddenly born was to prove eternal. A kiss and a knife-thrust were indeed typical of Chiquita's love.

The coach drove on; above the great trees rose already the lofty slate roofs of the castle. Vallombreuse turned to Sigognac and said:—

“ You must come up to my rooms and change your dress before I present you to my sister, who is not aware of my trip or of your coming. I planned the surprise, and I expect it will prove entirely successful. Draw down the blind on your side, so that you may not be seen and the surprise be complete. But what are we to do with this young vixen? ”

Chiquita, though sunk in thought, heard Vallombreuse's remark.

“ Have me taken to the Lady Isabella,” said she. “ She shall be the arbiter of my fate.”



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The blinds were drawn down and the carriage rattled into the court of honour. Vallombreuse took Sigo-gnac's arm, and led him to his apartments, having first ordered a servant to take Chiquita to the Countess de Lineuil.

On seeing the girl, Isabella laid down the book she was reading and looked at her questioningly. Chiquita remained motionless and silent until the footman had withdrawn; then with singular solemnity, she drew near Isabella and taking her hand said to her:—

“The knife is in Agostino's heart. I have no master now, and I feel the need of attaching myself to some one. Next to him who is dead, I love you better than any one on earth; you gave me the pearl necklace and you kissed me. Will you let me be your slave, your dog, your gnome? Give me a black rag or two to wear mourning for my love, and let me sleep across your door. I shall not be in your way. When you want me, whistle like this”—and she whistled. “I shall appear at once. Are you willing?”

For sole reply Isabella drew Chiquita to her heart, kissed her on the forehead, and accepted the soul that was giving itself to her.

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XXI

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ACCUSTOMED to Chiquita's strange and mysterious ways, Isabella had not questioned her, preferring to wait for explanations until the queer girl should have got over her excitement. She plainly enough understood that there was some terrible drama at the back of the affair, but the poor child had rendered her such true services that Isabella felt she must welcome her without inquiring into what was evidently a desperate case.

Having intrusted her to the care of one of her maids, she resumed the reading Chiquita's entrance had interrupted, although she was not much interested in the book. When she had read through a few pages, she found that she was paying no attention to the story ; she put in the marker, and laid the volume on the table by the side of some needlework she had commenced. Resting her head on her hand and letting her gaze wander into space, she indulged in her usual train of thought.



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“ What has become of Sigognac ? ” she said to herself. “ Does he still think of me ? Does he still love me ? No doubt he has returned to his wretched castle, and believing my brother is dead, he dares not show himself ; he is stopped by that imaginary obstacle. If it were not so, he would have made an effort to see me ; he would at least have written to me. Perhaps he is discouraged by the reflection that I am now a great match. Or it may be that he has forgotten me ! But no, that is impossible. I ought to have let him know that Vallombreuse is cured of his wound ; yet it is not proper for a well-bred girl to use such means of recalling a lover who has gone away ; it would offend the proprieties. I often wonder whether I should not have been better off if I had remained a simple actress ; I could at least have seen him every day, and secure in my virtue and his respect, I could have quietly enjoyed the delight of being loved. I feel sad and lonely in this splendid castle, in spite of my father’s tender affection. If Vallombreuse were here, even, he would keep me company, but his absence is growing longer, and I try in vain to make out what he meant by the words he uttered smilingly when he left, — ‘ Good-bye, sister ; you will have reason to be satisfied with me.’ At



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times I fancy I have got at his meaning, but I dare not dwell upon the thought, for the disappointment would be bitter indeed. But if it were true, I should go crazy with happiness."

The Countess de Lineuil,— for it is perhaps taking a liberty to call a Prince's acknowledged daughter plain Isabella—had got so far in her monologue, when a tall footman entered and inquired whether the Countess could see the Duke de Vallombreuse, who had just returned from his trip and wished to pay his respects to her.

"Ask him to come at once," replied the Countess; "I shall be delighted to see him."

In five minutes or so the young Duke entered the room, his complexion bright, his glance flashing, his gait firm and light, with the same conquering look he used to wear before he was wounded. He threw his plumed beaver upon a chair, took his sister's hand, and kissed it in tender and respectful fashion.

"My dear Isabella, I have been away longer than I wished, for I have become so accustomed to your gentle presence that it is quite a privation to miss seeing you. Nevertheless I was working for you



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on my trip, and the hope of giving you pleasure was a compensation."

"The greatest pleasure you could do me," returned Isabella, "was to remain here with your father and me, and not to go off travelling, when your wound was scarcely cured, to satisfy a passing whim."

"Was I wounded?" laughed Vallombreuse. "Upon my word, I remember it so little that it is as good as forgotten. Never have I felt so well, and my trip has done me a world of good. A saddle is far better for me than an invalid's chair. But you, dear sister, strike me as being thinner and paler. Have you felt weary? This is not a very bright place, and solitude is not good for young girls. Reading and embroidery are pretty dull pastimes when one has nothing else to do, and there are times when the most sedate maid, tired of watching the stagnant water in the moat, would like right well to see a cavalier's face."

"You are trying to make unseasonable fun of me, brother, and you like to tease me because I am a little bit dull. Did I not have the Prince's company, and is he not fatherly, kind, and full of wise and instructive speech?"

"Undoubtedly our father is an accomplished gentle-



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man, prudent in counsel, bold in action, a great nobleman at home, learned and proficient in all manner of knowledge. But the sort of enjoyment one gets with him is serious, and I do not intend that my dear sister shall spend her youth in solemn dulness. Now, as you would have neither the Chevalier de Vidalinc nor the Marquis de l' Estang, I set out in quest of the right man and I found just the one you need in the course of my trip. He is a charming, perfect, ideal husband, with whom I am sure you will be desperately in love."

"It is cruel of you, Vallombreuse, to persecute me with your jokes. You know very well, you wicked brother, that I have made up my mind to remain single. I could not give my hand without my heart, and my heart is not mine to give."

"You will sing to another tune when you see the husband I have selected for you."

"Never, never!" replied Isabella, in a voice filled with emotion; "I shall remain faithful to a beloved remembrance, for I do not suppose you intend to make me marry against my will."

"Assuredly not. I am not such a tyrant as all that. All I ask you is not to reject my protégé before you have seen him."



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And without waiting for his sister's consent, Vallombreuse rose and went into the next room, returning forthwith, accompanied by Sigognac, whose heart was beating tumultuously. The two young men stood hand in hand for a moment on the threshold hoping Isabella would look their way, but she kept her eyes down shyly, looking at the point of her bodice and thinking of the lover she had no idea was so near her.

Vallombreuse, seeing that she paid no heed to them and that she was sinking into her former train of thought, made a few steps towards her, leading Sigognac by the hand, holding the tips of his fingers as one does with a lady in a dance, and bowed ceremoniously to her, as did Sigognac also. The only difference was that Vallombreuse was smiling and Sigognac turning pale, for while brave where men were concerned, he was timid towards women, as is always the case with great hearts.

“Countess de Lineuil,” said Vallombreuse, in a slightly grandiose way and as if purposely exaggerating etiquette, “permit me to present to you a good friend of mine, whom, I trust, you will receive favourably: Baron de Sigognac.”



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On hearing the name, which she at first supposed to be part of her brother's banter, Isabella started, and cast a quick glance at the new-comer. On seeing that Vallombreuse had not deceived her, her feelings almost overpowered her; she turned very pale, the blood having rushed to her heart; then, as the reaction came, her brow, her cheeks, and her bosom, so far as it could be seen under the kerchief, flushed rosy red. Without a word she rose and threw herself on Vallombreuse's neck and hid her face on his shoulder. Two or three sobs shook the girl's graceful figure, and a few tears wetted the velvet of the doublet at the place where rested her head. Isabella exhibited true maidenliness in the shyly pretty and modest action. It was a way of thanking Vallombreuse, whose ingenious kindness she had fathomed, and as she could not kiss her lover, she kissed her brother instead.

When he thought she had had time to recover herself, Vallombreuse gently freed himself from her embrace, and putting aside her hands, with which she had covered her face to hide her tears, said:—

“ Dear sister, pray let us look at your lovely face; else my protégé will fancy that you feel insurmountable repulsion towards him.”



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Isabella obeyed and turned on Sigognac her beauteous eyes lighted with heavenly joy, in spite of the glittering pearls that yet trembled upon her long lashes. She held her fair hand out to him, and the Baron, bowing low, kissed it tenderly. The kiss thrilled the girl to the heart and she nearly fainted, but it is easy to recover after such a delicious sensation.

“Was I not right,” said Vallombreuse, “when I insisted that you would welcome the suitor I had chosen? It is good at times to be obstinate, for if I had not been as firm as you were resolute, our dear Sigognac would have had to return to his place without having seen you; and that would have been a pity, would it not?”

“Yes, I own it, my dear brother. You have given proof in this whole matter of adorable kindness of heart. You alone, under the circumstances, could bring about a reconciliation, since you alone had been the sufferer.”

“Indeed,” said Sigognac, “the Duke de Vallombreuse has shown himself possessed, so far as I am concerned, of a great and generous heart. He put away a not unnatural resentment, and came to me with open hand and open heart. He has nobly revenged himself for the hurt I did him by placing upon



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me a light burden of eternal gratitude, which I shall gladly bear to my dying day."

"Do not mention it, my dear Baron," answered Vallombreuse. "You would have done just the same. Two brave men always end by getting to understand each other; crossed swords bind souls, and we were sure sooner or later to turn into a pair of friends like Theseus and Pirithoüs, Nisus and Euryalus, Pythias and Damon. But do not trouble about me; rather tell my sister how you kept regretting her and thinking of her in that castle of Sigognac of yours, where I nevertheless made one of the best meals in my life, though you did swear it was customary to starve in your habitation."

"I also enjoyed a very good supper there," said Isabella, smiling, "and a very pleasant remembrance it is."

"The end of it will be," returned Sigognac, "that every one will turn out to have feasted regally in my Tower of Hunger; but I am not ashamed of the poverty which interested you in me, dear Isabella. On the contrary, I bless it, for I owe everything to it."

"I am of opinion," said Vallombreuse, "that it would be as well for me to go and greet my father,



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and to inform him of your arrival, although it is not unexpected by him, I must confess. And by the way, Countess, is it quite understood that you accept Baron de Sigognac for your husband? I should not like to put my foot into it. You do accept him? All right; then I may withdraw. Engaged couples have sometimes very innocent confidences to exchange, when even a brother's presence is undesirable. I leave you together, feeling sure that you will be obliged to me for doing so. Besides, I was never intended for a gooseberry. Good-bye for the present. I shall return ere long to take Sigognac to the Prince."

Uttering these words in an off-hand way, the young Duke put on his hat and went out, leaving the true lovers to themselves. Pleasant as was his company, his room was pleasanter still.

Sigognac drew near Isabella and took her hand, nor did she withdraw it. For a few moments the pair looked at each other with eyes full of happiness, in a silence more eloquent than words. Long deprived of the pleasure of meeting, Isabella and Sigognac could not gaze sufficiently long on each other. At last the Baron said to her:—

“I can scarcely credit my happiness. Is not mine



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a strange fate? You loved me because I was poor and unhappy, and the very cause which should have insured my loss has wrought my fortune. A company of strolling players held for me an angel of beauty and virtue. An attempt on my life won me a friend, and your abduction led to your being recognised by your father, who had sought you in vain. And all this was the result of a waggon losing its way on the moors on a dark night."

"We were meant for each other; it was writ in Heaven. Kindred souls always end by meeting if only they wait patiently. I felt plainly, at your château of Sigognac, that I had met my fate. When I saw you, my heart, which no attentions had before touched, knew its master. Your shyness did more for you than other men's audacity, and from that moment I resolved I should belong either to you or to God."

"And yet, you wicked girl, you refused me your hand even when I begged for it on my knees! I know very well it was through self-sacrifice, but it was very cruel self-sacrifice."

"For which I shall make up to you to the best of my ability, dear Baron. Here is my hand; my heart you already have. The Countess de Lineuil is not



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bound by the restraints that hemmed in dowerless Isabella. My only fear was that your pride would lead you to refuse me in your turn. But surely, had you done so, you would not have married any one else, would you? You would have remained faithful, even though hopelessly so? I was in your thoughts, was I not, when Vallombreuse went to find you out in your castle?"

"Dearest Isabella, I had not a thought by day that did not wing its flight to you; and at night, when I laid down my head upon the pillow yours had once touched, I besought the god of dreams to show me your lovely face in his magic mirror."

"And did he often grant your wish?"

"Never once did he fail to do so, and the dawn alone made you vanish through the ivory portals. The days seemed endless to me, and I wished I could have slept on for ever."

"I, too, have seen you in dreams many and many a night; our loving souls kept tryst in the same dreams. But, Heaven be thanked, we are reunited for many a day; for ever, I hope. The Prince, with whom Vallombreuse must have had an understanding — for my brother would not have heedlessly



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induced you to take this step — will no doubt favourably entertain your request. He has repeatedly spoken of you to me in eulogious fashion, looking at me the while in a way that greatly disturbed me and which I dared not interpret, for Vallombreuse had not then declared that he felt no anger against you."

At this moment the young Duke returned, and informed Sigognac that the Prince was awaiting him. Sigognac rose, bowed to Isabella, and followed Vallombreuse through a number of rooms, at the end of which were the Prince's apartments. The old lord, dressed in black, and wearing his orders, was seated in a great arm-chair, near the window, behind a table covered with a Turkish rug and strewn with books and papers. His expression, although affable, was somewhat grave, like that of a man expecting an important visit. The light, as it fell in satiny sheen upon his brow, brought out like silver threads a few hairs that had escaped from the curls carefully arranged around his temples by his valet. His glance was kindly, firm, and clear; and time, which had robbed his face of part of its beauty by imprinting traces of its passage upon it, had compensated for this by adding majesty to the features. On seeing the Prince, even



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when he did not wear the insignia of his rank, it was impossible not to experience a feeling of veneration, and the veriest and coarsest boor would have known him for a great lord. The Prince half rose from his chair, in answer to Sigognac's bow, and signed to him to sit down.

“ My lord and father,” said Vallombreuse, “ I present to you Baron de Sigognac, formerly my rival, now my friend, and, if you are willing, my relative to be. It is to him that I owe my reformation, and that is no slight obligation. The Baron is here to respectfully request of you a favour which I should dearly love to have you grant him.”

The Prince nodded assent as if to encourage Sigognac to speak. The latter, thus emboldened, rose, bowed, and said :—

“ Prince, I beg to ask for the hand of your daughter, the Lady Isabella, Countess de Lineuil.”

The Prince remained silent for a moment, as if thinking the matter over, then he answered :—

“ Baron de Sigognac, I grant your request, and I consent to the match, provided my daughter's feelings, which I do not wish to force in any way, concur with my own paternal desire. I shall not urge her, and it



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is for the Countess de Lineuil to decide finally in this matter. We must hear what she says, for young women have strange fancies at times."

The Prince uttered these words with a courtier's slightly sarcastic tone and knowing smile, just as if he had not long been aware that Isabella loved Sigognac; but his dignity required that he should appear to be ignorant of the fact, even though he let it be understood that he was well acquainted with it. So, after a brief pause, he said:—

"Vallombreuse, fetch your sister, for I am really unable to give an answer to Baron de Sigognac unless she is present."

Vallombreuse disappeared and soon returned with Isabella, who was more dead than alive, for, in spite of her brother's assurances, she could not yet bring herself to believe in so great a happiness. Her bosom rose and fell, the colour had left her cheeks and her limbs scarcely supported her. The Prince drew her close to him, and she trembled so much that she was obliged, in order to keep from falling to the ground, to lean upon the arm of his chair.

"My daughter," said the Prince, "this gentleman does you the honour of asking your hand of me. It



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would rejoice me to see you married to him, for he is of an old family, of unblemished reputation, and appears to me to combine every desirable qualification. As far as I am concerned, I fully approve of him, but the question is whether you do so. Young people do not always agree with graybeards. Question your own heart, and tell me whether you are willing to take Baron de Sigognac for your husband. Take your own time, for in so serious a matter, haste is most undesirable."

The Prince's cordial and kindly smile plainly proved that he was merely teasing, and Isabella, therefore, feeling emboldened, threw her arms around her father's neck and said, in a charmingly caressing way: —

“I need not spend much time in reflecting upon the matter. Since you approve of Baron de Sigognac, I will freely and frankly confess to you, my lord and father, that I have loved him since the day I first saw him, and that I have never wished to have any other husband than he. I am most happy to obey you.”

“In that case, clasp hands and exchange a kiss in token of betrothal,” said the Duke de Vallombreuse, gaily. “The novel ends more pleasantly than might



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have been looked for from its troubled beginning. When is the wedding to be?"

"The tailors," said the Prince, "will need quite a week to cut and make up the dresses, and the coach-makers will need as much time to get the carriages ready. Meanwhile, Isabella, here is your dowry," he added, handing her a bundle of parchment. "It consists of the county of Lineuil, the name of which you bear, which brings in with its forests, ponds, meadows, and arable land, fifty thousand crowns a year. And as for you, Sigognac, here is a royal ordinance appointing you Governor of a province. No one better deserves it."

Vallombreuse a moment before had left the room, and now reappeared followed by a lackey carrying a casket in a red velvet case.

"Little sister," said he to the young bride, "here is your wedding-present."

He handed her the casket, on the cover of which were the words, "For Isabella." It was the casket he had once offered to the actress, and which she had very properly refused to accept. .

"You will accept it now," he said, with an engaging smile, "and you will save these diamonds, of the first



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water, and these pearls of the finest orient, from going to the bad. May they remain as pure as you."

Isabella smilingly took the necklace and fastened it on her neck, by way of proving to the splendid gems that she bore them no ill-will. She next slipped on her arm the triple row of pearls, and fastened the rich earrings to her ears.

There is little more to tell. At the end of the week, the chaplain of Vallombreuse married Isabella and Sigognac,—the groomsman of the latter being the Marquis de Biuyères,—in the castle chapel, which was a mass of flowers and ablaze with candles. Singers, brought by the young Duke, sang, with voices that seemed to come from heaven, and to return to it, a motet of Palestrina's. Sigognac was radiant; Isabella adorable under her long white veil, and never would it have been suspected, unless one had known her in the old days, that the lovely lady whose mien was at once so noble and modest and who looked like a princess of the blood, had performed in plays on the other side of the footlights. Sigognac, Governor of a province and Captain of the Musketeers, superbly dressed, was utterly unlike the unfortunate nobleman whose poverty was described at the beginning of this tale.



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After a splendid meal, at which were present the Prince, Vallombreuse, the Marquis de Bruyères, the Chevalier de Vidalinc, the Marquis de l'Estang, and a few virtuous ladies, friends of the family, the wedded pair disappeared, and we leave them on the threshold of the nuptial chamber softly singing, “Hymen! O Hymen!” after the manner of the ancients.

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XXII

THE CASTLE OF HAPPINESS

EPILOGUE

IT will readily be conceived that Isabella, now Baroness de Sigognac, had not forgotten, amid the grandeur in which she now lived, her good comrades who formed Herod's company. She could not invite them to her wedding on account of the difference in rank between them, but she had made gifts to every one of them with a grace so charming that it doubled their worth. Until the company took its departure, she frequently attended their performances, applauding at the right places, like the connoisseur she was, for the new Baroness did not even attempt to conceal the fact that she had been a strolling player; a capital way of preventing spiteful people from saying it, which they would not have failed to do had she sought to keep the fact secret. Besides, the illustrious station she occupied made people hold their tongues, and her modesty soon won all hearts to her, even the

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hearts of the women, who agreed that there was no more highly bred lady at Court. King Louis XIII, having heard of Isabella's adventures, praised her highly for her virtue, and let it be seen that he held Sigognac in much esteem on account of the latter's self-control; for, being himself a chaste monarch, he had no liking for bold and licentious youth. Vallombreuse had greatly improved in his ways, thanks to the influence of his brother-in-law; a fact that greatly pleased the Prince.

So the young married pair lived very happily, each more than ever in love with the other, and free from that satiety of happiness that spoils the pleasantest of lives. For some time past, however, Isabella had seemed given over to the active prosecution of some secret purpose. She held private consultations with her steward; an architect called to see her and to submit plans to her; sculptors and painters had received orders from her and had started for an unknown destination. All this was done without Sigognac's knowledge, and with the assistance of Vallombreuse, who appeared to be in the secret.

One fine morning, some months later, — the time having no doubt been required for the carrying out of



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her project,—Isabella said to Sigognac, just as if the thought had suddenly occurred to her:—

“My dear lord, do you ever think of your poor little castle of Sigognac? Do you not feel that you would like to revisit the cradle of our loves?”

“I am not so ungrateful as to forget it, and I have more than once thought of returning there, but I did not venture to propose the trip, not knowing whether you would care for it. I could never have taken on myself to drag you away from the delights of the Court, of which you are the fairest ornament, in order to hale you to my ruinous castle, the abode of rats and owls, but which I nevertheless prefer to the grandest palaces, for it is the ancient home of my ancestors, and the place where first I met you; a place for ever sacred to me and which I would willingly adorn with an altar.”

“For my part,” said Isabella, “I have often wondered whether the wild rose in the garden still bears blooms.”

“I would swear it does,” returned Sigognac. “Besides, as you once touched it, flowers it will always bear, even if for solitude’s charm only.”

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“Unlike ordinary husbands,” laughingly replied the Baroness de Sigognac, “you are more complimentary after marriage than before, and you make up madrigals for your wife as others would for their mistress. Since your wish accords with my fancy, what say you to starting this week? The season is lovely, the great heat is over, and we can make the trip comfortably. Vallombreuse will accompany us, and I shall take Chiquita, who will be glad to see her own countryside again.”

The preparations did not take long, and the start was soon made. The trip was a quick and delightful one, Vallombreuse having taken care to provide relays of horses on the road; and in the course of a few days the party reached the spot where the road leading to the Sigognac place branched off from the main highway. It was about two o’clock in the afternoon, and the sky was brilliant with light.

When the coach turned into the avenue and the castle suddenly came into view, Sigognac stared in amazement. He failed to recognise the places so familiar to him. The road had been mended and the ruts had vanished; the hedges were trimmed and allowed travellers to pass without scratching them with



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their thorns ; the trees, skilfully trimmed, cast correct shadows and within their arching boughs framed in a wonderful view.

Instead of the gloomy ruin, the description of which has perhaps not been forgotten, there now rose in the bright sunshine a brand-new castle, which bore the same likeness to the former one that a son does to his father. Yet there was no change in the form ; the architectural lines were similar ; the difference was that in the course of a few months it had grown younger by some centuries. The fallen stones had been reset in their places ; the slender white turrets, topped with pretty slate roofs, with symmetrical patterns, stood up proudly, like feudal sentries, at the four corners of the castle, their gilded vanes showing in the bright azure. A roof, adorned with an elegant metal-work ridge ornament, had replaced the old broken-in roof with its leprous and mossy tiles. In the window sashes, the wooden boardings having been cleared away, glittered new panes set in lead fillets, in the shape of disks and diamonds. There was not a single crack visible upon the façade, which had been completely restored. Superb gates of oak, hung upon richly wrought iron hinges, closed the gateway formerly



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unprotected by a pair of worm-eaten, weather-stained gates. On the keystone of the arch, amid lambrequins cleverly carved anew, gleamed the Sigognac coat of arms; on a field azure three storks argent, with the proud motto, formerly effaced and now plainly legible in gilt letters : *Alta petunt.*

Sigognac remained silent for a time, lost in the contemplation of the wonderful sight. Then he turned to Isabella and said : —

“ You are the kind fairy to whom I am indebted for this transformation of my home. With a single touch of your wand you have restored to it splendour, beauty, and youth. I am most deeply grateful to you for this surprise; it is charming and lovely, as is everything you do. You guessed, without my having breathed it, the secret wish of my heart.”

“ You must thank also,” said Isabella, pointing to Vallombreuse who sat in the corner of the carriage, “ a certain enchanter who has been of the greatest assistance to me in all this business.”

The Baron pressed the young Duke’s hand.

While this conversation was going on, the coach had reached a court regularly laid out in front of the castle, from the ruddy brick chimneys of which rose into the



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heavens great clouds of white smoke, testifying to the fact that distinguished guests were expected.

Peter, in a handsome new livery, was standing on the threshold, and threw the leaves of the door wide-open on the approach of the carriage, and the Baron, the Baroness, and the Duke alighted at the foot of the steps. Eight or ten lackeys, standing in double row upon the steps, bowed low to their new masters, whom they did not yet know.

Skilful artists had restored the vanished freshness of the frescoes on the walls. The Hercules in their cases supported the imitation cornice with an ease due to their muscles that swelled in true Florentine fashion. The Roman emperors swaggered in their more brilliant purple. The leaks of rain water no longer made geographical maps with their stains on the vaulting, and through the simulated trellis-work showed a cloudless sky.

Everywhere a similar metamorphosis had taken place. The wainscotting and the floors had been restored; new furniture, of the same style as the old, had taken the place of the latter. One's memories of the place were refreshed, not bewildered. The Flanders tapestry, with the duck-hunter, still hung on the walls of Sigo-



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gnac's room, but its colours had been revived by careful cleansing. The bedstead was the same, but a patient wood-carver had stopped up the worm-holes, added to the small figures on the frieze the noses and fingers they had lost, touched up the worn ornaments, and restored to the old piece of furniture its original appearance. A white and green brocatelle, of the same pattern as the old one, hung in folds between the spiral pillars, which themselves were well waxed and polished.

Isabella, always thoughtful, had avoided indulging in inappropriate luxury, a danger when one has large means at one's command. She had desired to give pleasure to her husband, whom she loved tenderly, by bringing back to him the memories of his childhood, but freed from their wretchedness and their sadness. In the manor that had once been so gloomy everything now was bright. Even the portraits of his ancestors, cleansed of the dirt that had overlaid them, restored and newly varnished, smiled out of their gilded frames with a youthful air. The grumpy dowagers, the prudish canonesses no longer, as of yore, turned their noses up at Isabella, once an actress and now a Baroness ; they welcomed her as one of the family.



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In the court-yard there was no trace of nettles, hemlock, or other weeds that grow apace in damp, solitary, and neglected places. The paving-stones, pointed with cement, had lost the green edging which is a token of a deserted home. Through the well cleaned sashes of the rooms the doors of which were formerly closed up, could be seen curtains of rich stuffs, proving they were ready for the reception of guests.

They went down to the garden by steps, the stones of which, reset and freed from mosses, no longer gave way under the tread of the over-confiding. At the foot of the steps, carefully preserved, grew the wild rose that, on the morning of Sigognac's departure, had furnished a flower for the young actress. There was a single rose on it, which Isabella plucked and put into her bosom, welcoming it as a happy omen that her love would prove lasting.

The gardener had wrought to the full as hard as the architect, and thanks to his pruning, order had been restored in the virgin forest. Now no greedy branches barred the way, no sharp-thorned bramble stayed the steps, and a lady might pass on without having her dress torn ; the trees once again formed arbours and arches ; the clipped boxwood framed within the com-

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partments they enclosed every flower known to Flora. At the foot of the garden, Pomona, cured of her leprosy, displayed her divine white nudity. A cleverly restored marble nose had given her back her Greek profile, and her basket held carved fruit and not poisonous toadstools, while from the lion's mouth there poured into the basin an abundance of limpid water. Climbing plants, covered with bell-like blooms of every hue, their tendrils clinging to a solid trellis painted green, picturesquely concealed the outer wall and imparted a pleasantly rustic air to the rockery that formed the niche of the statue. Never, even in their palmiest days, had the castle and the gardens been so richly and tastefully furnished forth. The glory of the Sigognacs, so long eclipsed, now shone resplendent.

Sigognac, walking amazed and delighted as in a dream, pressed Isabella's arm close to his breast, and was not ashamed of the tears of emotion that coursed down his cheeks.

“And now,” said Isabella, “that we have seen everything, we must visit the lands which I have quietly caused to be bought up, in order to restore the old barony of Sigognac to its former extent, or nearly so. Allow me to put on my riding habit. I shall not



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be long, for my former profession accustomed me to change my dress quickly. In the meantime, go and select the horses we shall ride, and have them saddled."

: Vallombreuse carried off Sigognac, who found in the once deserted stables ten handsome horses in oaken stalls, furnished with straw litter. Their firm, polished quarters shone like satin, and on hearing the visitors the noble animals turned their intelligent gaze upon them. A sudden neigh made itself heard. It was good old Bayard who had recognised his master and was greeting him after the manner of his kind. The old servant, whom Isabella had been most careful to keep, had the warmest and most comfortable stall at the end of the row. His manger was filled with crushed oats, to save his old teeth, and between his legs dozed his old comrade Miraut, who got up and came to lick Sigognac's hand. The fact that Beelzebub had not yet shown up is not to be charged against his kind little feline heart, but to the prudent habits of his breed, habits that were greatly upset by the turmoil going on in a place once so still. Concealed in a garret, he was awaiting nightfall to make his appearance and pay his respects to his well-beloved master.

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The Baron patted Bayard and then selected a handsome bay, which was at once led out of the stables ; the Duke chose a Spanish jennet, with a fine head, worthy to carry an Infant, and for the Baroness a rich green velvet saddle was put on a lovely white palfrey, whose coat shone like silver. Isabella soon appeared, dressed in the neatest of riding costumes, that set off the beauty of her perfect figure. She wore a jacket of blue velvet, trimmed with silver buttons, frogs, and lace, with basque falling over a long pearl-gray satin skirt. For head-dress she had a man's white felt hat, shaded with a curled blue feather that fell down upon her neck. To prevent her golden hair being disarranged by the rapidity of the ride, she had bound it, with charming coquetry, with a blue net embroidered with silver beads.

Thus apparelléd, Isabella was most charming, and the proudest beauties of the Court would have had to own themselves vanquished. Her cavalier dress brought out, along with the modest grace that ordinarily marked her, a touch of superiority that spoke of her illustrious birth. She was still Isabella, but at the same time a Prince's daughter, a Duke's sister, and the wife of a nobleman whose nobility antedated the



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Crusades. Vallombreuse noticed it and could not help exclaiming : —

“ How regal you look to-day, sister ! Hippolyta herself, the Queen of the Amazons, assuredly had no prouder port or more victorious mien.”

Isabella, assisted by Sigognac, sprang lightly into the saddle, the Duke and the Baron mounted their steeds, and the party rode out into the court outside the castle, where they met the Marquis de Bruyères and a number of noblemen living in the neighbourhood, who had come to pay their respects to the newly wedded pair. The latter proposed to return to the house, in obedience to the dictates of courtesy, but the visitors protested that it would be a pity to interrupt the ride just as their hosts were starting, and swung their horses round to accompany the young couple and the Duke de Vallombreuse.

The party, increased by five or six persons in gala dress, for the country gentry had donned their finest garments, had indeed a splendid and stately appearance ; it was quite a princess’s train. Riding along a well kept road, they went past green meadows, rich farms, and well managed woods, all of which belonged to Sigognac. The moors with their purple heather seemed to have retreated from the castle.

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As the party happened to be passing through a fir copse on the limits of the barony, the baying of hounds was heard, and presently Yolande de Foix appeared, accompanied by her uncle the Commander and one or two gallants. The road was narrow, and the two companies rubbed against each other as they passed in opposite directions, although each tried to make room for the other. Yolande's horse reared and curveted, and her skirt flapped against Isabella's. She was flushed with anger and was evidently seeking for something insulting to say, but Isabella was above feminine vanity. The thought of taking her revenge for the appellation of "gipsy girl" which Yolande had cast at her in other days, almost at that very spot, did not even occur to her. She reflected that her triumph as a rival might wound, if not Yolande's heart, at least her pride, and she bowed to Mlle. de Foix in a dignified, modest, and graceful manner; the latter was thus compelled, much as it went against the grain with her to do so, to reply with a slight inclination of her head. Baron de Sigognac bowed to her in the quietest and most unconcerned way, though very respectfully, nor could Yolande detect in the eyes of her former adorer a single flash of his former flame. She



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ashed her horse and galloped off with her small company.

“By Venus and Cupid!” said Vallombreuse gaily to the Marquis de Bruyères, by whose side he was riding, “that is a handsome girl, but she looks devilishly fierce and ill-tempered. Did you see the way she looked at my sister? She seemed to be trying to stab her with her glances.”

“When a girl has been the toast of the countryside,” replied the Marquis, “she does not particularly fancy being dethroned, and the victory unquestionably rests with her ladyship de Sigognac.”

The cavalcade returned to the castle. A sumptuous repast was served in the hall where of yore the Baron had entertained the players at supper with their own provisions, there being nothing in his larder. The guests were delighted with the excellence of the fare provided. Rich silver plate, bearing the Sigognac arms, gleamed on the damasked table-cloth, the pattern on which exhibited, among other designs, heraldic storks. The few pieces of the old service which were not wholly unfit for use had been religiously preserved and placed among the newer ones, so that the latter might not have too modern an air of luxury, and the ancient



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Sigognac might contribute its share to the splendours of the new.

The company sat down to table, Isabella in the same place she had occupied on that famous evening which had changed the Baron's fate. Both she and Sigognac thought of it, and the pair exchanged a lover's smile, full of tender remembrance and bright hopes.

Near the side table where the carving-equerry carved the joints, stood a man of athletic build, with a big pale face, fringed with a brown beard; he was dressed in black velvet, and wore round his neck a silver chain. From time to time he gave orders to the servants with a most majestic air. Near a dresser, laden with bottles, some pot-bellied, some long-necked, others protected by platted work, according to the nature of the contents, moved with much activity, in spite of his senile, trembling limbs, a queer-looking figure, with a Rabelaisian nose covered with grog-blossoms, cheeks illumined with the juice of the grape, and little sharp, greenish eyes surmounted by eyebrows in the form of circumflex accents. Sigognac, happening to look that way, recognised the former as being the tragic Herod, and the latter as the grotesque Blazius. Isabella, observing that he had remarked their presence, whis-



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pered to him that in order to save these poor people from the wretched life of strolling players, she had appointed the one majordomo, and the other cellarer of Sigognac, easy situations that did not call for much work from them, — a course the Baron fully approved.

The meal was proceeding, and the bottles, promptly replaced by Blazius, were following each other uninterruptedly, when Sigognac felt a head pressing against his knee and sharp claws performing a well remembered tattoo upon the other. It was Miraut and Beelzebub, who, profiting by the fact that a door had been left open, had slipped into the hall and, notwithstanding the fear inspired in their breasts by the numerous and brilliant company, had come to claim their share of the feast. Nor did Sigognac, now wealthy, repel these humble friends of his days of poverty. He patted Miraut and scratched Beelzebub's cropped ears, distributing to them an abundant share of tit-bits. The crumbs from his table on this occasion were morsels of pastry, pieces of partridge, bits of fish, and other succulent food. Beelzebub was happy beyond expression, and scratched away, calling for still another morsel, without ever tiring out Sigognac's patience, for the cat's voracity amused him. At last, swelled

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out like a barrel, walking with his legs apart, and scarcely able to purr, the old black cat withdrew to the room hung with the Flanders tapestry and curled himself up like a ball in his accustomed place to digest his bountiful repast.

Vallombreuse drank bumper for bumper with the Marquis de Bruyères, and the gentry did not tire of drinking the health of the wedded pair in glasses equally well filled; Sigognac, sober by temperament and habit, acknowledging the pledges by touching his lips to his glass, which was always full since he never drained it. At last the gentry, their heads pretty well fuddled, rose staggering from table and reached, not without requiring the assistance of the lackeys, the rooms that had been prepared for them.

Isabella, under the pretext of fatigue, had withdrawn at dessert. Chiquita, promoted to the post of lady's maid, had undressed her and robed her for the night with the silent activity characteristic of her way of serving. Chiquita was now a handsome girl: her complexion, no longer tanned by wind and weather, had cleared, though it still preserved the healthy and rich pallor so much admired by artists. Her hair, which had become acquainted with the uses of the



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comb, was neatly fastened with a red ribbon the ends of which fell down behind. She still wore the pearl necklace Isabella had given her; in the mind of the strange girl it was the symbol of her voluntary servitude, the pledge of a bond death alone could break. Her dress was black; she was in mourning for her one and only love, and her mistress had not objected to this fancy of hers. Chiquita, having nothing more to do, withdrew after kissing Isabella's hand, as she never failed to do night after night.

When Sigognac entered the room where he had spent so many a dull and lonely night, listening to the passing of the minutes that seemed to be hours, and to the weird moaning of the wind behind the arras, he saw, in the light shed by the Chinese lamp suspended from the ceiling, Isabella's lovely head bending towards him with a chaste and enchanting smile from between the curtains of green and white brocatelle. It was the full realisation of his dream of the days when he used to gaze at the empty bed with deep melancholy, for he then believed himself parted hopelessly and for ever from Isabella. There could be no doubt that Fate was behaving most handsomely to him.

Towards morning, Beelzebub, a prey to a strange

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excitement, left the arm-chair on which he had spent the night, and with difficulty made his way on to the bed. Once up, he pushed his nose into his sleeping master's hand, and tried to purr, though the sound more resembled a death-rattle. Sigognac woke up and saw Beelzebub staring at him as if begging for human help, his great green eyes, glazed and already half dead, larger than ever they had been. His coat had lost its shiny look and was wet with the sweat of agony ; he trembled all over and made desperate efforts to keep up upon his legs. His whole appearance indicated that he beheld something terrible. At last he fell on his side, his frame shook convulsively a few times, he uttered a sob like a child having its throat cut, and stiffened out just as though invisible hands had stretched out his limbs. He was dead.

His dying cry had wakened Isabella.

“ Poor Beelzebub,” she said, as she saw the dead animal. “ He had borne with the poverty of Sigognac, and is not to know it in prosperity.”

It must be confessed that Beelzebub was the victim of his own intemperance ; indigestion had finished him, his starved stomach not being accustomed to such plethora.



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Sigognac was much more moved by his death than might have been thought. He was not of opinion that animals were mere machines, and he believed they had souls, inferior no doubt to the souls of men, but susceptible nevertheless of intelligence and feeling. This, indeed, is the opinion of all who, having long lived alone with a dog, a cat, or other animal, have had opportunities of observing them and entering into relations with them. So it was that with moist eyes and a sad heart he wrapped up poor Beelzebub in a piece of cloth in order to bury him that night, — an action which might well have appeared ridiculous and sacrilegious to the vulgar.

When night had fallen Sigognac took a spade, a lantern, and the dead body of Beelzebub, stiff in its silken shroud. He went down to the garden, and began digging a hole at the foot of the wild-rose bush, by the light of the lantern, whose beams attracted the moths that beat the horn panes with their dusty wings. It was very dark. The moon showed faintly through an inky cloud, and the scene was more solemn than became the funeral of a cat. Sigognac dug deep, for he meant to bury his little friend so far down that wild beasts should not tear him up. Suddenly the iron

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of the spade struck fire as if it had hit a flint. The Baron thought it was a stone and dug harder, but the blows sounded strangely and the work was not getting on. Then Sigognac took up the lantern to see what was in the way, and to his surprise beheld the top of a coffer of oak, bound with heavy iron bands, much rusted, but still strong. He freed the box by digging around it, and using the spade as a lever, he managed to raise the mysterious coffer, in spite of its great weight, up to the top of the hole and slide it on to the hard ground. Then he placed Beelzebub in the empty space where the box had lain, and filled up the grave.

Having finished this job, he tried to carry his find to the castle, but the burden was too heavy for one man to handle, vigorous though he might be, and Sigognac therefore went in search of the faithful Peter to help him. The servant and the master each took hold of one of the handles of the box and carried it to the castle, bending under the weight.

Peter smashed the lock with an axe, and as the cover came off it revealed a considerable quantity of gold pieces: ounces, quadruples, sequins, Genoa pieces, Portuguese moneys, ducats, crosses, angels, and other



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coins of various denominations and countries, but none modern.

Old jewellery, enriched with gems, was mingled with the coins. At the bottom of the box, when they had emptied it, Sigognac found a parchment sealed with the Sigognac arms, the writing on which had faded with the damp. The signature alone was still fairly legible, and the Baron made out the words: "Raymond de Sigognac." It was the name of an ancestor of his who had gone off to the wars and had never returned, — the mystery of his death or disappearance never having been solved. He had left behind a son of tender years; and on the point of starting upon a dangerous expedition, he had buried his treasure, intrusting the secret of its location to a trusty man who had no doubt been surprised by death before he could reveal to the rightful heir the place where the money was concealed. It was from the departure of that particular Raymond that the decadence of the house of Sigognac, formerly rich and powerful, had dated. Such, at least, was the not improbable way in which the Baron, founding himself upon these slight premises, accounted for the find. What was quite clear was that the treasure belonged to him. He sent for Isabella, and showed her the heap of gold.

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“There can be no denying,” said the Baron, “that Beelzebub was the good genius of the Sigognacs. He makes me wealthy by his death, and leaves me only when the angel has come to me. His task was done, since you had brought me happiness.”

My Private Menagerie

*M Y P R I V A T E
M E N A G E R I E*

I

ANTIQUEITY

IHAVE often been caricatured in Turkish dress seated upon cushions, and surrounded by cats so familiar that they did not hesitate to climb upon my shoulders and even upon my head. The caricature is truth slightly exaggerated, and I must own that all my life I have been as fond of animals in general and of cats in particular as any brahmin or old maid. The great Byron always trotted a menagerie round with him, even when travelling, and he caused to be erected, in the park of Newstead Abbey, a monument to his faithful Newfoundland dog Boatswain, with an inscription in verse of his own inditing. I cannot be accused of imitation in the matter of our common liking for dogs, for that love manifested itself



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in me at an age when I was yet ignorant of the alphabet.

A clever man being at this time engaged in preparing a "History of Animals of Letters," I jot down these notes in which he may find, so far as my own animals are concerned, trustworthy information.

The earliest remembrance of this sort that I have goes back to the time of my arrival in Paris from Tarbes. I was then three years old, so that it is difficult to credit the statement made by Mirecourt and Vapereau, who affirm that I "proved but an indifferent pupil" in my native town. Home-sickness of a violence that no one would credit a child with being capable of experiencing, fell upon me. I spoke our local dialect only, and people who talked French "were not mine own people." I would wake in the middle of the night and inquire whether we were not soon to start on our return to our own land.

No dainty tempted me, no toy could amuse me. Drums and trumpets equally failed to relieve my gloom. Among the objects and beings I regretted figured a dog called Cagnotte, whom it had been found impossible to bring with us. His absence told on me to such an extent that one morning, having first chucked out of



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the window my little tin soldiers, my German village with its painted houses, and my bright red fiddle, I was about to take the same road to return as speedily as possible to Tarbes, the Gascons, and Cagnotte. I was grabbed by the jacket in the nick of time, and Josephine, my nurse, had the happy thought to tell me that Cagnotte, tired of waiting for us, was coming that very day by the stage-coach. Children accept the improbable with artless faith; nothing strikes them as impossible; only, they must not be deceived, for there is no impairing the fixity of a settled idea in their brains. I kept asking, every fifteen minutes, whether Cagnotte had not yet come. To quiet me, Josephine bought on the Pont-Neuf a little dog not unlike the Tarbes specimen. I did not feel sure of its identity, but I was told that travelling changed dogs very much. I was satisfied with the explanation and accepted the Pont-Neuf dog as being the authentic Cagnotte. He was very gentle, very amiable, and very well behaved. He would lick my cheeks, and indeed his tongue was not above licking also the slices of bread and butter cut for my afternoon tea. We lived on the best of terms with each other.

Presently, however, the supposed Cagnotte became



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sad, troubled, and his movements lost their freedom. He found it difficult to curl himself up, lost his jolly agility, breathed hard and could not eat. One day, while caressing him, I felt a seam that ran down his stomach, which was much swelled and very tight. I called my nurse. She came, took a pair of scissors cut the thread, and Cagnotte, freed of a sort of over-coat made of curled lambskin, in which he had been tricked out by the Pont-Neuf dealers to make him look like a poodle, appeared in all the wretched guise and ugliness of a street cur, a worthless mongrel. He had grown fat, and his scant garment was choking him. Once he was rid of his carapace, he wagged his ears, stretched his limbs, and started romping joyously round the room, caring nothing about being ugly so long as he was comfortable. His appetite returned, and he made up by his moral qualities for his lack of beauty. In Cagnotte's company I gradually lost, for he was a genuine child of Paris, my remembrance of Tarbes and of the high mountains visible from our windows; I learned French and I also became a thorough-paced Parisian.

The reader is not to suppose that this is a story I have invented for the sole purpose of entertaining



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him. It is literally true, and proves that the dog-dealers of that day were quite as clever as horse-coupers in the art of making up their animals and taking in purchasers.

After Cagnotte's death, my liking was rather for cats, on account of their being more sedentary and fonder of the fireplace. I shall not attempt to relate their history in detail. Dynasties of felines, as numerous as the dynasties of Egyptian kings, succeeded each other in our home. Accident, flight, or death accounted for them in turns. They were all beloved and regretted; but life is made up of forgetfulness, and the remembrance of cats passes away like the remembrance of men.

It is a sad thing that the life of these humble friends, of these inferior brethren, should not be proportionate to that of their masters.

I shall do no more than mention an old gray cat that used to side with me against my parents, and bit my mother's ankles when she scolded me or seemed about to punish me, and come at once to Childebrand, a cat of the Romanticist period. The name suffices to let my reader understand the secret desire I felt to run counter to Boileau, whom I disliked then, but



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with whom I have since made my peace. It will be remembered that Nicolas says : —

“ Oh ! ridiculous notion of poet ignorant
Who, of so many heroes, chooses Childebrand ! ”

It seemed to me that the man was not so ignorant after all, since he had selected a hero no one knew anything of; and, besides, Childebrand struck me as a most long-haired, Merovingian, mediæval, and Gothic name, immeasurably preferable to any Greek name, such as Agamemnon, Achilles, Idomeneus, Ulysses, or others of that sort. These were the ways of our day, so far as the young fellows were concerned, at least: for never, to quote the expression that occurs in the account of Kaulbach's frescoes on the outer walls of the Pinacothek at Munich, never did the hydra of “wiggery” (*perruquinisme*) erect its heads more fiercely, and no doubt the Classicists called their cats Hector, Patrocles, or Ajax.

Childebrand was a splendid gutter-cat, short-haired, striped black and tan, like the trunks worn by Saltabadil in “ *le Roi s'amuse.* ” His great green eyes with their almond-shaped pupils, and his regular velvet stripes, gave him a distant tigerish look that I liked. “ Cats



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are the tigers of poor devils," I once wrote. Childebrand enjoyed the honour of entering into some verses of mine, again because I wanted to tease Boileau :—

" Then shall I describe to you that picture by Rembrandt, that pleased me so much; and my cat Childebrand, as is his habit, on my knees resting, and anxiously up at me gazing, shall follow the motions of my finger as in the air it sketches the story to make it clear."

Childebrand came in well by way of a rime to Rembrandt, for the verses were meant for a Romanticist profession of faith addressed to a friend, since deceased, and in those days as enthusiastic an admirer of Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, and Alfred de Musset as I was.

I am compelled to say of my cats what Don Ruy Gomez de Silva said to Don Carlos, when the latter became impatient at the enumeration of the former's ancestors, beginning with Don Silvius " who thrice was Consul of Rome," that is, " I pass over a number, and of the greatest," and I shall come to Madame-Théophile, a red cat with white breast, pink nose, and blue eyes, so called because she lived with me on a footing of conjugal intimacy. She slept on the foot of my bed, snoozed on the arm of my chair while I was writing, came down to the garden and accompanied me



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on my walks, sat at meals with me and not infrequently appropriated the morsels on their way from my plate to my mouth.

One day a friend of mine, who was going out of town for a few days, intrusted his parrot to me with the request that I would take care of it during his absence. The bird, feeling strange in my house, had climbed, helping himself with his beak, to the very top of his perch, and looking pretty well bewildered, rolled round his eyes, that resembled the gilt nails on arm-chairs, and wrinkled the whitish membrane that served him for eyelids. Madame-Théophile had never seen a parrot, and she was evidently much puzzled by the strange bird. Motionless as an Egyptian mummy cat in its net-work of bands, she gazed upon it with an air of profound meditation, and put together whatever she had been able to pick up of natural history on the roofs, the yard, and the garden. Her thoughts were reflected in her shifting glance, and I was able to read in it the result of her examination: "It is unmistakably a chicken."

Having reached this conclusion, she sprang from the table on which she had posted herself to make her investigations, and crouched down in one corner of the



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room, flat on her stomach, her elbows out, her head low, her muscular backbone on the stretch, like the black panther in Gérôme's painting, watching gazelles on their way to the drinking-place.

The parrot followed her movements with feverish anxiety, fluffing out its feathers, rattling its chain, lifting its foot, and moving its claws, and sharpening its beak upon the edge of its seed-box. Its instinct warned it that an enemy was preparing to attack it.

The eyes of the cat, fixed upon the bird with an intensity that had something of fascination in it, plainly said in a language well understood of the parrot and absolutely intelligible: "Green though it is, that chicken must be good to eat."

I watched the scene with much interest, prepared to interfere at the proper time. Madame-Théophile had gradually crawled nearer; her pink nose was working, her eyes were half closed, her claws were protruded and then drawn in. She thrilled with anticipation like a gourmet sitting down to enjoy a truffled pullet; she gloated over the thought of the choice and succulent meal she was about to enjoy, and her sensuality was tickled by the idea of the exotic dish that was to be hers.



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Suddenly she arched her back like a bow that is being drawn, and a swift leap landed her right on the perch. The parrot, seeing the danger upon him, unexpectedly called out in a deep, sonorous bass voice: “Have you had your breakfast, Jack?”

The words filled the cat with indescribable terror; and she leapt back. The blast of a trumpet, the smash of a pile of crockery, or a pistol-shot fired by her ear would not have dismayed the feline to such an extent. All her ornithological notions were upset.

“And what did you have? — A royal roast,” went on the bird.

The cat’s expression clearly meant: “This is not a bird; it’s a man; it speaks.”

“When of claret I’ve drunk my fill,
The pot-house whirls and is whirling still,”

sang out the bird with a deafening voice, for it had at once perceived that the terror inspired by its speech was its surest means of defence.

The cat looked at me questioningly, and my reply proving unsatisfactory, she sneaked under the bed, and refused to come out for the rest of the day.

Those of my readers who have not been in the habit



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of having animals to keep them company, and who see in them, as did Descartes, merely machines, will no doubt think I am attributing intentions to the bird and the quadruped, but as a matter of fact, I have merely translated their thoughts into human speech. The next day, Madame-Théophile, having somewhat overcome her fright, made another attempt, and was routed in the same fashion. That was enough for her, and henceforth she remained convinced that the bird was a man.

This dainty and lovely creature adored perfumes. She would go into ecstasies on breathing in the patchouli and vetiver used for Cashmere shawls. She had also a taste for music. Nestling upon a pile of scores, she would listen most attentively and with every mark of satisfaction to the singers who came to perform at the critic's piano. But high notes made her nervous, and she never failed to close the singer's mouth with her paw if the lady sang the high A. We used to try the experiment for the fun of the thing, and it never failed once. It was quite impossible to fool my dilettante cat on that note.

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II

THE WHITE DYNASTY

LET me come to more recent times. A cat brought from Havana by Mlle. Aita de la Penuela, a young Spanish artist whose studies of white angora cats used to adorn and still adorn the show-windows of the print-sellers, gave birth to the daintiest little kitten, exactly like the puffs used for the application of face powder, which kitten was presented to me. Its immaculate whiteness caused it to be named Pierrot, and this appellation, when it grew up, developed into Don Pierrot of Navarre, which was infinitely more majestic and smacked of a grandee of Spain.

Don Pierrot, like all animals that are fondled and petted, became delightfully amiable, and shared the life of the household with that fulness of satisfaction cats derive from close association with the fireside. Seated in his customary place, close to the fire, he really looked as if he understood the conversation and was interested



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in it. He followed the speakers with his eyes, and every now and then would utter a little cry, exactly as if to object and give his own opinion upon literature, which formed the staple of our talks. He was very fond of books, and when he found one open on the table, he would lie down by it, gaze attentively at the page and turn the leaves with his claws; then he ended by going to sleep, just as if he had really been reading a fashionable novel. As soon as I picked up my pen, he would leap upon the desk, and watch attentively the steel nib scribbling away on the paper, moving his head every time I began a new line. Sometimes he endeavoured to collaborate with me, and would snatch the pen out of my hand, no doubt with the intention of writing in his turn, for he was as æsthetic a cat as Hoffmann's Murr. Indeed, I strongly suspect that he was in the habit of inditing his memoirs, at night, in some gutter or another, by the light of his own phosphorescent eyes. Unfortunately, these lucubrations are lost.

Don Pierrot of Navarre always sat up at night until I came home, waiting for me on the inside of the door, and as soon as I stepped into the antechamber he would come rubbing himself against my legs, arching



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his back and purring in gladsome, friendly fashion. Then he would start to walk in front of me, preceding me like a page, and I am sure that if I had asked him to do so, he would have carried my candle. In this way he would escort me to my bedroom, wait until I had undressed, jump up on the bed, put his paws round my neck, rub his nose against mine, lick me with his tiny red tongue, rough as a file, and utter little inarticulate cries by way of expressing unmistakably the pleasure he felt at seeing me again. When he had sufficiently caressed me and it was time to sleep he used to perch upon the backboard of his bed and slept there like a bird roosting on a branch. As soon as I woke in the morning, he would come and stretch out beside me until I rose.

Midnight was the latest time allowed for my return home. On this point Pierrot was as inflexible as a janitor. Now, at that time I had founded, along with a few friends, a little evening reunion called "The Four Candles Society," the place of meeting happening to be lighted by four candles stuck in silver candlesticks placed at each corner of the table. Occasionally the conversation became so absorbing that I would forget the time, even at the risk of seeing, like Cin-



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derella, my carriage turn into a pumpkin and my coachman into a big rat. Twice or thrice Pierrot sat up for me until two o'clock in the morning, but presently he took offence at my conduct and went to bed without waiting for me. I was touched by this mute protest against my innocently disorderly way of life, and thereafter I regularly returned home at midnight. Pierrot, however, proved hard to win back ; he wanted to make sure that my repentance was no mere passing matter, but once he was convinced that I had really reformed, he deigned to restore me to his good graces and again took up his nightly post in the antechamber.

It is no easy matter to win a cat's love, for cats are philosophical, sedate, quiet animals, fond of their own way, liking cleanliness and order, and not apt to bestow their affection hastily. They are quite willing to be friends, if you prove worthy of their friendship, but they decline to be slaves. They are affectionate, but they exercise free will, and will not do for you what they consider to be unreasonable. Once, however, they have bestowed their friendship, their trust is absolute, and their affection most faithful. They become one's companions in hours of solitude, sadness, and labour. A cat will stay on your knees a whole evening,



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purring away, happy in your company and careless of that of its own species. In vain do mewings sound on the roofs, inviting it to one of the cat parties where red herring brine takes the place of tea; it is not to be tempted and spends the evening with you. If you put it down, it is back in a jiffy with a kind of cooing that sounds like a gentle reproach. Sometimes, sitting up in front of you, it looks at you so softly, so tenderly, so caressingly, and in so human a way that it is almost terrifying, for it is impossible to believe that there is no mind back of those eyes.

Don Pierrot of Navarre had a mate of the same breed just as white as himself. All the expressions I have accumulated in the "Symphony in White Major" for the purpose of rendering the idea of snowy whiteness would be insufficient to give an idea of the immaculate coat of my cat, by the side of which the ermine's fur would have looked yellow. I called her Séraphita, after Balzac's Swedenborgian novel. Never did the heroine of that wondrous legend, when ascending with Minna the snow-covered summits of the Falberg, gleam more purely white. Séraphita was of a dreamy and contemplative disposition. She would remain for hours on a cushion, wide-awake and follow-



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ing with her eyes, with intensest attention, sights invisible to ordinary mortals. She liked to be petted, but returned caresses in a very reserved way, and only in the case of persons whom she honoured with her approbation, a most difficult thing to obtain. She was fond of luxury, and we were always sure to find her curled up in the newest arm-chair or on the piece of stuff that best set off her swan's-down coat. She spent endless time at her toilet; every morning she carefully smoothed out her fur. She used her paws to wash herself, and every single hair of her fur, having been brushed out with her rosy tongue, shone like brand-new silver. If any one touched her, she at once removed the traces of the touch, for she could not bear to be rumpled. Her elegance and stylishness suggested that she was an aristocrat, and among her own kind she must have been a duchess at the very least. She delighted in perfumes, stuck her little nose into bouquets, and bit with little spasms of pleasure at handkerchiefs on which scent had been put; she walked upon the dressing-table among the scent-bottles, smelling the stoppers, and if she had been allowed to do so would no doubt have used powder. Such was Séraphita, and never did a cat bear a poetic name more worthily.



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At about this time a couple of those sham sailors who sell striped rugs, handkerchiefs of pine-apple fibre and other exotic products, happened to pass through the Rue de Longchamps, where I was living. They had in a little cage a pair of white Norway rats with red eyes, as pretty as pretty could be. Just then I had a fancy for white creatures, and my hen-run was inhabited by white fowls only. I bought the two rats, and a big cage was built for them, with inner stairs leading to the different stories, eating-places, bedrooms, and trapezes for gymnastics. They were unquestionably happier and better off there than La Fontaine's rat in his Dutch cheese.

The gentle creatures, which, I really do not know why, inspire puerile repulsion, became astonishingly tame as soon as they found out that no harm was intended them. They allowed themselves to be petted just like cats, and would catch my finger in their ideally delicate little rosy hands, and lick it in the friendliest way. They used to be let out at the end of our meals, and would clamber up the arms, the shoulders, and the heads of the guests, emerging from the sleeves of coats and dressing-gowns with marvellous skill and agility. All these performances, carried out very



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prettily, were intended to secure permission to forage among the remains of the dessert. They were then placed on the table, and in a twinkling the male and female had put away the nuts, filberts, raisins, and lumps of sugar. It was most amusing to watch their quick, eager ways, and their astonishment when they reached the edge of the table. Then, however, we would hold out to them a strip of wood reaching to their cage, and they stored away their gains in their pantry.

The pair multiplied rapidly, and numerous families, as white as their progenitors, ran up and down the little ladders in the cage, so that ere long I found myself the owner of some thirty rats so very tame that when the weather was cold they were in the habit of nestling in my pockets in order to keep warm, and remained there perfectly still. Sometimes I used to have the doors of my City of Rats thrown open, and, after having ascended to the topmost story of my house, I whistled in a way very familiar to my pets. Then the rats, which find it difficult to ascend steps, climbed up the balusters, got on to the rail, and proceeding in Indian file while keeping their equilibrium like acrobats, ascended that narrow road not infrequently descended astride by schoolboys, and came to



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me uttering little squeaks and manifesting the liveliest joy. And now I must confess to a piece of stupidity on my part. I had so often been told that a rat's tail looked like a red worm and spoiled the creature's pretty looks, that I selected one of the younger generation and cut off the much criticised caudal appendage with a red-hot shovel. The little rat bore the operation very well, grew apace, and became an imposing fellow with mustaches. But though he was the lighter for the loss of his tail, he was much less agile than his comrades ; he was very careful about trying gymnastics and fell very often. He always brought up the rear when the company ascended the balusters, and looked like a tight-rope dancer trying to do without a balancing-pole. Then I understood the usefulness of a tail in the case of rats : it aids them to maintain their equilibrium when scampering along cornices and narrow ledges. They swing it to the right or the left by way of counterpoise when they lean over to the one side or the other ; hence the constant switching which appears so causeless. When one observes Nature carefully, one readily comes to the conclusion that she does nothing that is unnecessary, and that one ought to be very careful in attempting to improve upon her.



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No doubt my reader wonders how cats and rats, two races so hostile to each other, and the one of which is the prey of the other, can manage to live together. The fact is that mine got on wonderfully harmoniously together. The cats were good as gold to the rats, which had lost all fear of them. The felines were never perfidious, and the rats never had to mourn the loss of a single comrade. Don Pierrot of Navarre was uncommonly fond of them ; he would lie down by their cage and spend hours watching them at play. When by chance the door of the room was closed, he would scratch and miaoul gently until it was opened and he could join his little white friends, which often came and slept by him. Séraphita, who was more stand-off and who disliked the strong odour of musk given out by the rats, did not take part in their sports, but she never harmed them, and allowed them to pass quietly in front of her without ever unsheathing her claws.

The end of these rats was strange. One heavy, stormy summer's day, when the mercury was nearly up to a hundred degrees, their cage had been put in the garden, in an arbour covered with creepers, as they seemed to feel the heat greatly. The storm burst with



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lightnings, rain, thunder, and squalls of wind. The tall poplars on the river bank bent like reeds. Armed with an umbrella, which the wind turned inside out, I was just starting to fetch in my rats, when a dazzling flash of lightning, which seemed to tear open the very depths of heaven, stopped me on the uppermost of the steps leading from the terrace to the garden.

A terrific thunder-clap, louder than the report of a hundred guns, followed almost instantaneously upon the flash, and the shock was so violent that I was nearly thrown to the ground.

The storm passed away shortly after that frightful explosion, but, on reaching the arbour, I found the thirty-two rats, toes up, killed by the one and same stroke of lightning. No doubt the iron wires of their cage had attracted the electric fluid and acted as a conductor.

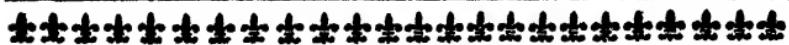
Thus died together, as they had lived, the thirty-two Norway rats,—an enviable death, not often vouchsafed by fate!

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III

THE BLACK DYNASTY

DON PIERROT of Navarre, being a native of Havana, required a hot-house temperature, and he enjoyed it in the house; round the dwelling, however, stretched great gardens, separated by open fences through which a cat could easily make its way, and rose great trees in which twittered, warbled, and sang whole flocks of birds; so that sometimes Pierrot, profiting by a door left open, would go out at night and start on a hunt, rambling through the grass and flowers wet with dew. In such cases he would have to await daylight to be let in, for although he would come and miaoul under our windows, his appeals did not always awaken the sleepers in the house. He had a delicate chest, and one night, when it was colder than usual, he caught a cold which soon turned into consumption. After coughing for a whole year poor Pierrot became thin and emaciated, and his coat, formerly so silky, had the mat whiteness of a



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shroud. His great transparent eyes had become the most important feature in his poor shrunken face ; his red nose had turned pale, and he walked with slow steps, in a melancholy fashion, by the sunny side of the wall, watching the yellow autumn leaves whirling and twisting. One could have sworn he was reciting to himself Millevoye's elegy. A sick animal is a very touching object, for it bears suffering with such gentle and sad resignation. We did all we could to save him ; I called in a very skilful physician who tested his chest and felt his pulse. Ass's milk was prescribed, and the poor little creature drank it willingly enough out of his tiny china saucer. He would remain for hours at a time stretched out on my knee like the shadow of a sphinx ; I could feel his vertebræ like the grains of a chaplet, and he would try to acknowledge my caresses with a feeble purr that sounded like a death-rattle. On the day he died, he lay on his side gasping, but got himself up by a supreme effort, came to me, and opening wide his eyes, fixed upon me a glance that called for help with intense supplication. He seemed to say to me, " You are a man ; do save me." Then he staggered, his eyes already glazed, and fell to the ground, uttering so woeful, so despair-



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ing, so anguished a cry that it filled me with mute horror. He was buried at the foot of the garden, under a white rosebush that still marks the place of his tomb.

Séraphita died two or three years later, of croup, which the physician was unable to master. She rests not far from Pierrot.

With her ended the White Dynasty, but not the family. From that pair of snow-white cats had sprung three coal-black kittens, a mystery the solution of which I leave to others. Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables" were then all the rage, and the names of the characters in the novel were in every one's mouth. The two little male cats were called Enjolras and Gavroche, and the female Eponine. They were the sweetest of kittens, and we trained them to fetch and carry pieces of paper thrown at a distance just as a dog would do. We got so far as to throw the paper ball on the top of wardrobes, or to hide it behind boxes or in tall vases, and they would retrieve it very prettily with their paws. On attaining years of discretion, they forsook these frivolous sports and resumed the dreamy, philosophical calm which is the real characteristic of cats.



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All negroes are alike to people who land in a slave-owning country in America, and it is impossible for them to tell one from another. So, to those who do not care for them, three black cats are three black cats and nothing more. But an observing eye makes no such mistake. The physiognomies of animals are as different as those of men, and I could always tell to which particular cat belonged the black face, as black as Harlequin's mask, and lighted by emerald disks with golden gleams.

Enjolras, who was by far the handsomest of the three, was marked by his big lion-like head and well whiskered cheeks, by his muscular shoulders, his long back, and his splendid tail, fluffy as a feather duster. There was something theatrical and grandiloquent about him, and he seemed to pose like an actor who attracts admiration. His motions were slow, undulating, and full of majesty ; he seemed to be always stepping on a table covered with china ornaments and Venetian glass, so circumspectly did he select the place where he put down his foot. He was not much of a Stoic, and exhibited a liking for food which his namesake would have had reason to blame. No doubt Enjolras, the pure and sober youth, would have said to



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him, as the angel did to Swedenborg, “ You eat too much.” We rather encouraged this amusing voracity, analogous to that of monkeys, and Enjolras grew to a size and weight very uncommon among domestic cats. Then I bethought myself of having him shaved in the style of poodles, in order to bring out completely his leonine appearance. He retained his mane and a long tuft of hair at the end of the tail, and I would not swear that his thighs were not adorned with mutton-chop whiskers like those Munito used to wear. Thus trimmed, he resembled, I must confess, a Japanese monster much more than a lion of the Atlas Mountains or the Cape. Never was a more extravagant fancy carried out on the body of a living animal; his closely clipped coat allowed the skin to show through, and its bluish tones, most curious to note, contrasted strangely with his black mane.

Gavroche was a cat with a sharp, satirical look, as if he intended to recall his namesake in the novel. Smaller than Enjolras, he was endowed with abrupt and comical agility, and in the stead of the puns and slang of the Paris street-Arab, he indulged in the funniest capers, leaps, and attitudes. I am bound to add that, yielding to his street instincts, Gavroche was in



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the habit of seizing every opportunity of leaving the drawing-room and going off to join, in the court, and even in the public streets, numbers of wandering cats, "of unknown blood and lineage low," with whom he took part in performances of doubtful taste, completely forgetful of his dignified rank as a Havana cat, the son of the illustrious Don Pierrot of Navarre, a grandee of Spain of the first class, and of the Marchioness Séraphita, noted for her haughty and aristocratic manners.

Sometimes he would bring in to his meals, in order to treat them, consumptive friends of his, so starved that every rib in their body showed, having nothing but skin and bones, whom he had picked up in the course of his excursions and wanderings, for he was a kind-hearted fellow. The poor devils, their ears laid back, their tails between their legs, their glance restless, dreading to be driven from their free meal by a house-maid armed with a broom, swallowed the pieces two, three, and four at a time, and like the famous dog, *Siete Aguas* (Seven Waters), of Spanish posadas, would lick the platter as clean as if it had been washed and scoured by a Dutch housekeeper who had served as model to Mieris or Gerard Dow. Whenever I saw



THE BLACK DYNASTY

Gavroche's companions, I remembered the lettering under one of Gavarni's drawings: "A nice lot, the friends you are capable of proceeding with!" But after all it was merely a proof of Gavroche's kindness of heart, for he was quite able to polish off the plateful himself.

The cat who bore the name of the interesting Eponine was more lissome and slender in shape than her brothers. Her mien was quite peculiar to herself, owing to her somewhat long face, her eyes slanting slightly in the Chinese fashion, and of a green like that of the eyes of Pallas Athene, on whom Homer invariably bestows the title of *γλαυκῶπις*, her velvety black nose, of as fine a grain as a Perigord truffle, and her incessantly moving whiskers. Her coat, of a superb black, was always in motion and shimmered with infinite changes. There never was a more sensitive, nervous, and electric animal. If she were stroked two or three times, in the dark, blue sparks came crackling from her fur. She attached herself to me in particular, just as in the novel Eponine becomes attached to Marius. As I was less taken up with Cosette than that handsome youth, I accepted the love of my affectionate and devoted cat, who is still the



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assiduous companion of my labours and the delight of my hermitage on the confines of the suburbs. She trots up when she hears the bell ring, welcomes my visitors, leads them into the drawing-room, shows them to a seat, talks to them — yes, I mean it, talks to them — with croonings and cooings and whimpers quite unlike the language cats make use of among themselves, and which simulate the articulate speech of man. You ask me what it is she says? She says, in the plainest possible fashion: “Do not be impatient; look at the pictures or chat with me, if you enjoy that. My master will be down in a minute.” And when I come in she discreetly retires to an arm-chair or on top of the piano, and listens to the conversation without breaking in upon it, like a well-bred animal that is used to society.

Sweet Eponine has given us so many proofs of intelligence, kindly disposition, and sociability that she has been promoted, by common consent, to the dignity of a *person*, for it is plain that a higher order of reason than instinct guides her actions. This dignity entails the right of eating at table like a person, and not from a saucer in a corner, like an animal. So Eponine’s chair is placed beside mine at lunch and dinner, and on



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account of her size she is allowed to rest her fore paws upon the edge of the table. She has her own place set, without fork or spoon, but with her glass. She eats of every course that is brought on, from the soup to the dessert, always waiting for her turn to be served and behaving with a discretion and decency that it is to be wished were more frequently met with in children. She turns up at the first sound of the bell, and when we enter the dining-room we are sure to find her already in her place, standing on her chair, her paws on the edge of the table, and holding up her little head to be kissed, like a well-bred young lady who is polite and affectionate towards her parents and her elders.

The sun has its spots, the diamond its flaws, and perfection itself its little weak points. Eponine, it must be owned, has an overmastering fondness for fish, a taste she shares in common with all her race. The Latin proverb, *Catus amat pisces, sed non vult tingere plantas*, to the contrary notwithstanding, she is always ready to pop her paw into the water to fish out a blay, a small carp, or a trout. Fish makes her well-nigh delirious, and like children eagerly looking for the dessert, she is apt to object to the soup, when the



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preliminary investigations she has carried on in the kitchen have enabled her to ascertain that the fish has duly come in and that there is no reason why Vatel should run himself through with his sword. In such cases we do not help her to fish, and I remark to her, in a cold tone, "A lady who has no appetite for soup cannot have any appetite for fish," and the dish is remorselessly sent past her. Then seeing that it is no joking matter, dainty Eponine bolts her soup in hot haste, licks up the very last drop of the bouillon, puts away the minutest crumb of bread or Italian paste, and turns round to me with the proud look of one conscious of being without fear or reproach and of having fulfilled her duty. Her share of the fish is handed to her, and she despatches it with every mark of extreme satisfaction. Then, having tasted a little of every dish, she winds up her meal by drinking one-third of a glassful of water.

If we happen to have guests at dinner, Eponine does not need to have seen them enter to be aware that there is to be company. She simply looks at her place, and if she sees a knife, fork, and spoon laid there, she makes off at once and perches on the piano stool, her usual place of refuge in such cases. Those who



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deny reasoning powers to animals may explain this fact, so simple apparently, yet so suggestive, as best they may. That judicious and observant cat of mine deduces from the presence by her plate of utensils which man alone understands how to use that she must give up her position for that day to a guest, and she forthwith does so. Never once has she made a mistake. Only, when she is well acquainted with the particular guest, she will climb upon his knee and seek, by her graceful ways and her caresses, to induce him to bestow some tit-bit upon her.

But enough of this; I must not weary my readers, and stories of cats are less attractive than stories about dogs. Yet I deem that I ought to tell of the deaths of Enjolras and Gavroche. In the Latin Rudiments there is a rule stated thus: *Sua eum perdidit ambitio*. Of Enjolras it may be said: *Sua eum perdidit pinguitudo*, that is, his admirable condition was the cause of his death. He was killed by idiotic fanciers of jugged hare. His murderers, however, perished before the end of the year in the most painful manner; for the death of a black cat, an eminently cabalistic animal, never goes unavenged.

Gavroche, seized with a frantic love of freedom, or



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rather with a sudden attack of vertigo, sprang out of the window one day, crossed the street, climbed the fence of the Parc Saint-James, which faces our house, and vanished. In spite of our utmost endeavours, we never managed to hear of him again, and a shadow of mystery hangs over his fate; so that the only survivor of the Black Dynasty is Eponine, who is still faithful to her master and has become a thorough cat of letters.

Her companion now is a magnificent angora cat, whose gray and silver fur recalls Chinese spotted porcelain. He is called Zizi, alias "Too Handsome to Work." The handsome fellow lives in a sort of contemplative *kief*, like a theriaki under the influence of the drug, and makes one think of "The Ecstasies of Mr. Hochenez." Zizi is passionately fond of music, and, not satisfied with listening to it, he indulges in it himself. Sometimes, in the dead of night, when everybody is asleep, a strange, fantastic melody, which the Kreislers and the musicians of the future might well envy, breaks in upon the silence. It is Zizi walking upon the key-board of the piano which has been left open, and who is at once astonished and delighted at hearing the keys sing under his tread.



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It would be unjust not to link with this branch Cleopatra, Eponine's daughter, whose shy disposition keeps her from mingling in society. She is of a tawny black, like Mummia, Atta-Croll's hairy companion, and her two green eyes look like huge aqua-marines. She generally stands on three legs, her fourth lifted up like a classical lion that has lost its marble ball.

These be the chronicles of the Black Dynasty. Enjolras, Gavroche, and Eponine recall to me the creations of a beloved master; only, when I re-read "Les Misérables," the chief characters in the novel seem to me to be taken by black cats, a fact that in no wise diminishes the interest I take in it.

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IV

THIS SIDE FOR DOGS

I HAVE often been charged with not being fond of dogs; a charge which does not at first sight appear to be very serious, but which I nevertheless desire to clear myself of, for it implies a certain amount of dislike. People who prefer cats are thought by many to be cruel, sensuous, and treacherous, while dog-lovers are credited with being frank, loyal, and open-hearted,—in a word, possessed of all the qualities attributed to the canine race. I in no wise deny the merits of Médor, Turk, Miraut, and other engaging animals, and I am prepared to acknowledge the truth of the axiom formulated by Charlet,—“The best thing about man is his dog.” I have been the owner of several, and I still own some. Should any of those who seek to discredit me come to my house, they would be met by a Havana lap-dog barking shrilly and furiously at them, and by a greyhound that very likely would bite their legs for them. But my affection for



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dogs has an understratum of fear. These excellent creatures, so good, so faithful, so devoted, so loving, may go mad at any moment, and then they become more dangerous than a lance-head snake, an asp, a rattlesnake or a cobra capella. This reacts on my love for dogs. Then dogs strike me as a bit uncanny; they have such a searching, intense glance; they sit down in front of you with so questioning a look that it is fairly embarrassing. Goethe disliked that glance of theirs that seems to attempt to incorporate man's soul within itself, and he drove away dogs, saying, "You shall not swallow my monad, much as you may try."

The Pharamond of my canine dynasty was called Luther. He was a big white spaniel, with liver spots, and handsome brown ears. He was a setter, had lost his owner, and after looking for him a long time in vain, had taken to living in my father's house at Passy. Not having partridges to go after, he had taken to rat-hunting, and was as clever at it as a Scotch terrier. At that time I was living in that blind alley of the Doyenné, now destroyed, where Gérard de Nerval, Arsène Houssaye and Camille Rogier were the heads of a little picturesque and artistic Bohemia, the eccentric mode of life in which has been so well told by



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others that it is unnecessary to relate it over again. There we were, right in the centre of the Carrousel, as independent and solitary as on a desert island in Oceanica, under the shadow of the Louvre, among the blocks of stone and the nettles, close to an old ruinous church, with fallen-in roof which looked most romantic in the moonlight. Luther, with whom I was on a most friendly footing, seeing that I had finally abandoned the paternal nest, made a point of coming to see me every morning. He started from Passy, no matter what the weather was, came down the Quai de Billy, the Cours-la-Reine, and reached my place at about eight o'clock, just as I was waking. He used to scratch at the door, which was opened for him, and he dashed joyously at me with yelps of joy, put his paws on my knees, received with a modest and unassuming air the caresses his noble conduct merited, took a look round the room, and started back to Passy. On arriving there, he went to my mother, wagged his tail, barked a little, and said as plainly as if he had spoken: "I have seen young master; don't worry; he is all right." Having thus reported to the proper person the result of his self-imposed mission, he would drink up half a bowlful of water, eat his food, lie down on

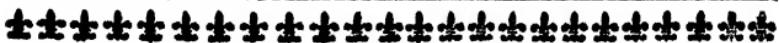


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the carpet by my mother's chair,— for he entertained peculiar affection for her,— and sleep for an hour or two after his long run. Now, how do people who maintain that animals do not think and are incapable of putting two and two together explain this morning visit, which kept up family relations and brought to the home-nest news of the fledgeling that had so recently left it?

Poor Luther's end was very sad. He became taciturn, morose, and one fine morning bolted from the house, feeling the rabies on him and resolved not to bite his masters; so he fled, and we have every reason to believe that he was killed as a mad dog, for we never saw him again.

After a pretty long interregnum a new dog was brought into the house. It was called Zamore, and was a sort of spaniel, of very mixed breed, small in size, with a black coat, save the tan spots over his eyes and the tan hair on his stomach. On the whole he was insignificant physically, and ugly rather than handsome; but morally, he was a remarkable dog. He absolutely despised women, would not obey them, never would follow them, and never once did my mother or my sisters manage to win from him the least sign of friend-



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ship or deference. He would accept their attentions and the tit-bits they gave him with a superior air, but never did he express any gratitude for them. Never would he yelp, never would he rap the floor with his tail, never bestow on them a single one of those caresses dogs are so fond of lavishing. He remained impassible in a sphinx-like pose, like a serious man who will not take part in the conversation of frivolous persons. The master he had elected was my father, in whom he acknowledged the authority of the head of the house, and whom he considered a mature and serious man. But his affection for him was austere and stoical, and was not shown by gambadoes, larks, and lickings. Only, he always kept his eyes upon him, followed his every motion and kept close to heel, never allowing himself the smallest escapade or the least nod to any passing comrades. My dear and lamented father was a great fisherman before the Lord, and he caught more barbels than Nimrod ever slew antelopes. It certainly could not be said of his fishing-rod that it was a pole and string with a worm at one end and a fool at the other, for he was a very clever man, and none the less he daily filled his basket with fish. Zamore used to accompany him on his trips, and



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during the long night-watches entailed by ground-line fishing for the big fellows, he would stand on the very edge of the water, apparently trying to fathom its dark depths and to follow the movements of the prey. Although he often pricked up his ears at the faint and distant sounds that, at night, are heard in the deepest silence, he never barked, having understood that to be mute is a quality indispensable in a fisherman's dog. In vain did Phœbe's alabaster brow show above the horizon reflected in the sombre mirror of the river; Zamore would not bay at the moon, although such prolonged ululation gives infinite delight to creatures of his species. Only when the bell on the set-line tinkled did he look at his master and allow himself one short bark, knowing that the prey was caught; and he appeared to take the greatest interest in the manœuvres involved in the landing of a three or four pound barbel.

No one would have suspected that under his calm, abstracted, philosophical look, this dog, so serious that he was almost melancholy, and despised all frivolity, nursed an overmastering, strange, never to be suspected passion, absolutely contrary to his apparent moral and physical character.



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“You do not mean,” I hear my reader exclaim, “that the good Zamore had hidden vices? — that he was a thief?” No. “A libertine?” No. “That he loved brandied cherries?” No. “That he bit people?” Never. Zamore was crazy about dancing. He was an artist devoted to the choreographic art.

He became conscious of his vocation in the following manner. One day there appeared on the square at Passy a gray mule, with sores on its back, and drooping ears, one of those wretched ‘mountebanks’ asses that Decamps and Fouquet used to paint so well. The two baskets balanced on either side of his raw and prominent backbone contained a troupe of trained dogs, dressed as marquesses, troubadours, Turks, Alpine shepherdesses, or Queens of Golconda, according to their sex. The impresario put down the dogs, cracked his whip, and suddenly every one of the actors forsook the horizontal for the perpendicular position, and transformed itself into a biped. The drum and fife started up and the ballet commenced.

Zamore, who was gravely idling around, stopped smitten with wonder at the sight. The dogs, dressed in showy colours, braided with imitation gold lace on every seam, a plumed hat or a turban on their heads,



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and moving in cadence to a witching rhythm, with a distant resemblance to human beings, appeared to him to be supernatural creatures. The skilfully linked steps, the slides, the pirouettes delighted but did not discourage him. Like Correggio at the sight of Raphael's painting, he exclaimed in his canine speech, *Anch' io son pittore!* and when the company filed past him, he also, filled with a noble spirit of emulation, rose up, somewhat uncertainly, upon his hind legs and attempted to join them, to the great delight of the onlookers.

The manager did not see it in that light, and let fly a smart cut of his whip at Zamore, who was driven from the circle, just as a spectator would be ejected from the theatre did he, during the performance, take on himself to ascend to the stage and to take part in the ballet.

This public humiliation did not check Zamore's vocation. He returned home with drooping tail and thoughtful mien, and during the whole of the remainder of that day was more reserved, more taciturn, and more morose than ever. But in the dead of night my sisters were awakened by slight sounds, the cause of which they could not conjecture, which proceeded from an



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uninhabited room next theirs, where Zamore was usually put to bed on an old arm-chair. It sounded like a rhythmic tread, made more sonorous by the silence of night. They at first supposed that the mice were romping round, but the sound of steps and leaps on the flooring was too loud for that. The bravest of my sisters rose, partly opened the door, and by the light of a moonbeam streaming in through a pane, she beheld Zamore on his hind legs, pawing the air with his fore paws, and busy studying the dancing steps he had admired in the street that morning. The gentleman was practising !

Nor did this prove, as might be supposed, a passing fancy, a momentary attraction ; Zamore persisted in his choregraphic aspirations and turned out a fine dancer. Every time he heard the fife and drum he would run out on the square, slip between the spectators' legs and watch, with the closest attention, the trained dogs performing their exercises. Mindful, however, of the whip-cut, he no longer attempted to take part in the dancing ; he took note of the poses, the steps, and the attitudes, and then, at night, in the silence of his room, he would work away at them, remaining the while, during the day, as austere in his bearing as ever. Ere



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long he was not satisfied with copying; he took to composing, to inventing, and I am bound to say few dogs surpassed him in the elevated style. I often used to watch him through the half-open door; he practised with such enthusiasm that every night he would drain dry the bowl of water placed in one corner of the room.

When he had become quite sure of himself and the equal of the most accomplished of four-footed dancers, he felt he could no longer hide his light under a bushel and that he must reveal the mystery of his accomplishments. The court-yard of the house was closed, on one side, by an iron fence with spaces sufficiently wide to allow moderately stout dogs to enter in easily. So one fine morning some fifteen or twenty dog friends of his, connoisseurs no doubt, to whom Zamore had sent letters of invitation to his *début* in the choreographic art, met around a square of smooth ground nicely levelled off, which the artist had previously swept with his tail, and the performance began. The dogs appeared to be delighted and manifested their enthusiasm by *ouahs!* *ouahs!* closely resembling the *bravi* of dilettanti at the Opera. With the sole exception of an old and pretty muddy poodle, very wretched looking, and a critic, no doubt, who barked out something about forgetting



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sound tradition, all the spectators proclaimed Zamore the Vestris of dogs and the god of dancing. Our artist had performed a minuet, a jig, and a *deux temps* waltz. A large number of two-footed spectators had joined the four-footed ones, and Zamore enjoyed the honour of being applauded by human hands.

Dancing became so much a habit of his that when he was paying court to some fair, he would stand up on his hind legs, making bows and turning his toes out like a marquis of the *ancien régime*. All he lacked was the plumed hat under his arm.

Apart from this he was as hypochondriacal as a comic actor and took no part in the life of the household. He stirred only when he saw his master pick up his hat and stick. Zamore died of brain fever, brought on, no doubt, by overwork in trying to learn the schottische, then in the full swing of its popularity. Zamore may say within his tomb, as says the Greek dancer in her epitaph: "Earth, rest lightly on me, for I rested lightly on thee."

How came it that being so talented, Zamore was not enrolled in Corvi's company? For I was even then sufficiently influential as a critic to manage this for him. Zamore, however, would not leave his mas-



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ter, and sacrificed his self-love to his affection, a proof of devotion which one would look for in vain among men.

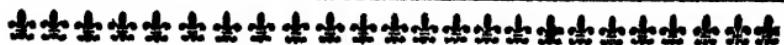
A singer, named Kobold, a thorough-bred King Charles from the famous kennels of Lord Lauder, took the place of the dancer. It was a queer little beast, with an enormous projecting forehead, big goggle eyes, nose broken short off at the root, and long ears trailing on the ground. When Kobold was brought to France, knowing no language but English, he was quite bewildered. He could not understand the orders given him; trained to answer to "Go on," or "Come here," he remained motionless when he was told, in French, "Viens," or "Va-t'en." It took him a year to learn the tongue of the new country in which he found himself and to take part in the conversation. Kobold was very fond of music, and himself sang little songs with a very strong English accent. The A would be struck on the piano, and he caught the note exactly and modulated with a flute-like sound phrases that were really musical and that had no connection whatever with barking or yelping. When we wanted to make him go, on, all we had to do was to say, "Sing a little more," and he would repeat the cadence. Although he was fed.



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with the utmost care, as was proper in the case of a tenor singer and so distinguished a gentleman, Kobold had one eccentric taste: he would eat earth just like a South American savage. We never succeeded in curing him of the habit, which proved the cause of his death. He was very fond of the stablemen, the horses, and the stable, and my ponies had no more constant companion than he. He spent his time between their loose-boxes and the piano.

After Kobold, the King Charles, came Myrza, a tiny Havana poodle that had the honour of being for a time the property of Giulia Grisi, who gave her to me. She is snow-white, especially when she is fresh from her bath and has not had time to roll over in the dust, a fancy some dogs share with dust-loving birds. She is extremely gentle and affectionate, and as sweet-tempered as a dove. Her little fluffy face, her two little eyes that might be mistaken for upholstery nails, and her little nose like a Piedmont truffle, are most comical. Tufts of hair, curly as Astrakhan fur, fall over her face in the most picturesque and unexpected way, hiding first one eye and then the other, so that she has the most peculiar appearance imaginable and squints like a chameleon.



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In Myrza, nature imitates the artificial so perfectly that the little creature looks as if she had stepped out of a toy-shop. When her coat is nicely curled, and she has got on her blue ribbon bow and her silver bell, she is the image of a toy dog, and when she barks it is impossible not to wonder whether there is a bellows under her paws.

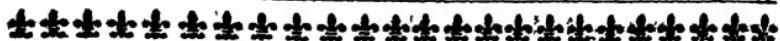
She spends three-fourths of her time in sleep, and her life would not be much changed were she stuffed, nor does she seem particularly clever in the ordinary intercourse of life. Yet she one day exhibited an amount of intelligence absolutely unparalleled in my experience. Bonnegrâce, the painter of the portraits of Tchoumakoff and E. H., which attracted so much attention at the exhibitions, had brought to me, in order to get my opinion upon it, one of his portraits painted in the manner of Pagnest, remarkable for truthfulness of colour and vigour of modelling. Although I have lived on terms of closest intimacy with animals and could tell a hundred traits of the ingenuity, reasoning, and philosophical powers of cats, dogs, and birds, I am bound to confess that animals wholly lack any feeling for art. Never have I seen a single one notice a picture, and the story of the birds that picked at the



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grapes in the painting by Zeuxis, strikes me as a piece of invention. It is precisely the feeling for ornament and art that distinguishes man from brutes. Dogs never look at pictures and never put on earrings. Well, Myrza, at the sight of the portrait placed against the wall by Bonnegrâce, sprang from the stool on which she was lying curled up, dashed at the canvas and barked furiously at it, trying to bite the stranger who had made his way into the room. Great was her surprise when she found herself compelled to recognise that she had a plane surface before her, that her teeth could not lay hold of it, and that it was no more than a vain presentment. She smelled the picture, tried to wedge in behind the frame, looked at us both with a glance of questioning and wonder, and returned to her place, where she disdainfully went to sleep again, refusing to have anything more to do with the painted individual. Myrza's features will not be lost to posterity, for there is a fine portrait of her by the Hungarian artist, Victor Madarasz.

Let me close with the story of Dash. One day a dealer in broken bottles and glass stopped at my door in quest of such wares. He had in his cart a puppy, three or four months old, which he had been commis-



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sioned to drown, wherat the worthy fellow grieved much, for the dog kept looking at him with a tender and beseeching look as if he knew well what was going to happen. The reason of the severe sentence passed on the puppy was that he had broken his fore paw. My heart was filled with pity for him, and I took charge of the condemned creature; called in a vet, and had Dash's paw set in splints and bandaged. It was impossible, however, to stop him gnawing at the dressings; the paw could not be cured, and the bones not having knitted, it hung limp like the sleeve of a man who has lost an arm. His infirmity, however, did not prevent his being jolly, lively, and full of fun, and he managed to race along quite fast on his three legs.

He was an out and out street dog, a rascally little cur that Buffon himself would have been puzzled to classify. He was ugly, but his features were uncommonly mobile and sparkled with cleverness. He seemed to understand what was told him, and his expression would change according as the words addressed to him, in the same tone of voice, were flattering or injurious. He rolled his eyes, turned up his lips, indulged in the wildest of nervous twitchings, or



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else grinned and showed his white teeth, obtaining in this way most comical effects of which he was perfectly conscious. He would often try to talk; laying his paw on my knee, he would fix on me that earnest gaze of his and begin a series of murmurs, sighs, and grunts, so varied in intonation that it was hard not to recognise them as language. Sometimes in the course of a conversation of this sort, Dash would break out into a bark or a yelp, and then I would look sternly at him and say: "That is barking, not speaking. Is it possible that you are an animal?" Dash, feeling humiliated at the suggestion, would go on with his vocalisation, giving it the most pathetic expression. We used to say then that Dash was telling his tale of woe.

He was passionately fond of sugar, and at dessert, when coffee was brought in, he would invariably beg each guest for a piece with such insistence that he was always successful. He had ended by transforming this merely benevolent gift into a regular tax which he collected with unfailing regularity. He was but a little mongrel, yet with the frame of a Thersites he had the soul of an Achilles. Infirm though he was, he would attack, with madly heroic courage, dogs ten times his

***** THIS SIDE FOR DOGS

size and was regularly and terribly thrashed by them. Like Don Quixote, the brave Knight of La Mancha, he set out triumphantly and returned in most evil plight. Alas! he was destined to fall a victim to his own courage. Some months ago he was brought home with a broken back, the work of a Newfoundland, an amiable brute, which the next day played the same trick to a small greyhound.

Dash's death was the first of a series of catastrophes: the mistress of the house where he met with the death-stroke was, a few days later, burned alive in her bed, and the same fate overtook her husband who was trying to save her. This was merely a fatal coincidence and by no means an expiation, for these people were of the kindest and as fond of animals as is a Brahmin, besides being wholly innocent of our poor Dash's tragic fate.

It is true that I have still another dog, called Nero, but he is too recent an inmate of our home to have a story of his own.

(NOTE.—Alas! Nero has been poisoned quite recently, just as if he had been supping with the Borgias, and his epitaph comes in the very first chapter of his life.)

MY PRIVATE MENAGERIE

V

MY HORSES

NOW let not the reader, on seeing this title, hastily accuse me of being a swell. Horses ! That is a pretentious word to be written 'down by a man of letters ! *Musa pedestris*, says Horace ; that is, the Muse goes on 'foot, and Parnassus itself 'has but one horse in its stable, Pegasus. Besides, he is a winged steed and by no means quiet in 'harness, if we may credit what Schiller tells us in his ballad. I am not a sportsman, alas ! and deeply do I regret it, for I am as fond of horses as if I had five hundred thousand a year, and I am entirely of the opinion of the Arabs concerning pedestrians. The 'horse' is man's natural pedestal, and the one complete being is the centaur, whom mythology so ingeniously invented.

'Nevertheless, although I am merely a man of letters, I 'have owned horses. In the year 1843 or 1844, I found in the pay-dirt of journalism, washed out in the



MY HORSES

wooden pan of the *feuilleton*, a sufficient quantity of gold dust to justify the hope that I might feed, besides my cats, dogs, and magpies, a couple of animals of larger size. I first had a couple of Shetland ponies, the size of big dogs, hairy as bears, all mane and tail, and who looked at me in such friendly fashion through their long black hair that I felt more like showing them into the drawing-room than sending them to the stable. They would take sugar out of my pockets like trained horses. But they proved to be decidedly too small; they would have answered as saddle horses for English children eight years of age, or as coach horses for Tom Thumb, but I was already in the enjoyment of that athletic and portly frame for which I am famed, and which has enabled me to bear up, without bending too much under the burden, under forty consecutive years of supplying of copy. The difference between the owner and the animals was unquestionably too striking, even though the little black ponies drew at a very lively gait the light phaeton to which they were harnessed with the daintiest tan harness, that looked as if it had been bought in a toy shop.

Comic illustrated papers were not as numerous then as now, but there were quite enough of them to publish



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caricatures of me and of my horses. It goes without saying that, profiting by the latitude allowed to caricature, I was represented as of elephantine bulk and appearance, like the god Ganesa, the Hindoo god of wisdom, and that my ponies were shown as no larger than poodles, rats, or mice. It is also true that I could readily enough have carried my pair one under each arm, and taken the carriage on my back. I did for a moment think of having a pony four-in-hand, but such a Liliputian equipage would have merely attracted greater attention. So to my great regret, for I had already become fond of them, I replaced my Shetlands with two dapple-gray cobs of larger size, with powerful necks, broad chests, stout and well set up, which were not Mecklenburghers, no doubt, but plainly more capable of dragging me along. They were both mares, the one called Jane, the other Betsy. So far as outward looks went, they were as alike as two peas, and never was there a better matched pair apparently. But Betsy was as lazy as Jane was willing. While the one drew steadily, the other was satisfied with trotting along, saving herself and taking good care to do nothing. These two animals, of the same breed, of the same age, and destined to live in the same stable, had



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the liveliest antipathy for each other. They could not bear one another, fought in the stable, and bit each other as they reared in harness. It was impossible to reconcile them, which was a pity, for with their hog manes, like those of the horses on the Parthenon frieze, their quivering nostrils, and their eyes dilated with anger, they looked uncommonly handsome as they were driven up or down the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. A substitute had to be found for Betsy, and a small mare, somewhat lighter coloured, for it had been impossible to match her exactly, was brought round. Jane immediately welcomed the new-comer and did the honours of the stable to her most graciously, and ere long they became fast friends. Jane would rest her head on Blanche's neck — she had been so called because her gray coat was rather whitish — and when they were let loose in the yard after being rubbed down, they would play together like a pair of dogs or children. If one was taken out driving, the one left in the stable was plainly wearying for her, and as soon as she heard in the distance the ring of her companion's hoofs on the paving-stones, she set up a joyous neigh, like a trumpet-blast, to which the other did not fail to reply as she approached.



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They would come up to be harnessed with astonishing docility, and took of themselves their proper place by the pole. Like all animals that are loved and well treated, Jane and Blanche soon became most familiar and trusting. They would follow me without bridle or halter like the best-trained dog, and when I stopped they would stick their noses on my shoulder in order to be caressed. Jane was fond of bread, and Blanche of sugar, and both were crazy about melon skin. I could make them do anything in return for these dainties.

If man were not odiously brutal and ferocious, as he too frequently shows himself towards animals, they would cling to him most gladly. Their dim brain is filled with the thought of that being who thinks, speaks, and does things the meaning of which escapes them ; he is a mystery and a wonder to them. They will often look at you with eyes full of questions you cannot answer, for the key to their speech has not yet been found. Yet they have a speech which enables them to exchange, by means of intonations not yet noted by man, ideas that are rudimentary, no doubt, but which are such as may be conceived by creatures within their sphere of action and feeling. Less stupid than we are, animals succeed in understanding a few



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words of our idiom, but not enough to enable them to converse with us. Besides, as the words they do learn refer solely to what we exact of them, the conversation would be brief. But that animals speak cannot be doubted by any one who has lived in any degree of intimacy with dogs, cats, horses, or other creatures of that sort.

For instance, Jane was naturally intrepid; she never refused, and nothing frightened her, but after a few months of cohabitation with Blanche her character changed and she manifested at times sudden and inexplicable fear. Her companion, much less brave, must have told her ghost stories at night. Often, when going through the Bois de Boulogne at dusk or after dark, Blanche would stop short or shy, as if a phantom, invisible to me, had risen up before her. She trembled in every limb, breathed hard, and broke out into sweat. If I attempted to urge her ahead with the whip, she backed, and all Jane could do, strong as she was, was insufficient to induce her to go on. One of us would have to get down, cover her eyes with the hand and lead her until the vision had vanished. Little by little Jane became subject to the same terror, the reason of which, no doubt, Blanche told her once they were back in their stable. I may as well confess that for my



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part, when I would be driving down a dark road on which the moonlight produced alternations of light and shadow, and Blanche suddenly became rooted to the spot as though a spectre had sprung at her head, and refused to move,—she who was usually so docile that Queen Mab's whip, made of a cricket's bone with a spider's thread for a thong, was enough to start her into a gallop,—I could not repress a slight shudder or refrain from peering into the darkness rather anxiously, while at times the harmless trunks of ash or birch trees would appear to me as spectral-looking as one of Goya's “Caprices.”

I took great delight in driving these dear animals myself, and we soon became very intimate. It was merely as a matter of form that I held the reins, for the least click of the tongue was enough to direct them, to turn them to the right or the left, to make them go faster, or to stop them. They quickly learned all my habits and started of themselves for the office, the printer's, the publishers', the Bois de Boulogne, and the houses where I went to dinner on certain days of the week, and this so accurately that they would have ended by compromising me, for they would have revealed the places to which I paid the most mysterious



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visits. If I happened to forget the time in the course of an interesting or tender conversation they would remind me it was getting late by neighing or pawing in front of the balcony.

Although I greatly enjoyed traversing the city in the phaeton drawn by my two friends, I could not help at times thinking the north wind sharp and the rain cold when the months came along which the Republican calendar named so appropriately the months of mist, of frost, of rain, of wind, of snow (brumaire, frimaire, pluviôse, ventôse, nivôse), so I purchased a small blue coupé, lined with white reps, which was likened to the equipage of the famous dwarf of the day, a piece of impertinence I did not mind. A brown coupé, lined with garnet, followed the blue one, and was itself replaced by a dark-green coupé lined with dark blue, for I actually did sport a coach—I, poor newspaper writer holding no Government stock—for five or six years. And my ponies were none the less fat and in good condition though they were fed on literature, had substantives for oats, adjectives for hay, and adverbs for straw. But alas! there came, no one knows very well why, the Revolution in February; a great many paving-stones were picked up for patriotic purposes, and



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Paris became rather unfit for carriage travel. I could of course have escaladed the barricades with my agile steeds and my light equipage, but it was only at the cook-shop that I could get credit, and I could not possibly feed my horses on roast chicken. The horizon was dark with heavy clouds, through which flashed red gleams. Money had taken fright and gone into hiding; the *Presse*, on the staff of which I was, had suspended publication, and I was glad enough to find a person willing to buy my horses, harness, and carriages for a fourth of their value. It was a bitter grief to me, and I would not venture to say that no tears ran down my cheeks on to the manes of Jane and Blanche when they were led away. Sometimes their new owner would drive past the house; I always knew their quick, sharp trot at a distance, and always the sudden way they would stop under my windows proved that they had not forgotten the place where they had been so tenderly loved and so well cared for, and a sigh would break responsive from me as I said to myself: "Poor Jane, poor Blanche! I wonder if they are happy."

And the loss of them is the one and only thing I felt sore over when I lost my slender fortune.

